

**The Aesthetics of
Robert Browning**

WENGER





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THE AESTHETICS
of
ROBERT BROWNING

By
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
at the University of Michigan.

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INTRODUCTION.

1. General Purpose and Plan.

The universal appreciation of the Beautiful and a quite general tendency on the part of mankind to speculate upon the nature and meaning of the things he appreciates has always resulted in considerable reflection on the character, methods, and effects of art. These reflections, whether expressed or not, exist as a haphazard or systematized aesthetics in all thinking minds. For the formulation of a systematic aesthetics one looks chiefly to the philosophers, but some of the finest contributions to aesthetic theory have come from the artists themselves in random, meditative moods when they set down their thoughts about their art. To be a great aesthete even requires something of the artistic temperament, but at the same time such a temperament is inherently more or less at odds with all systematisations. The high task of reconciling the inherent antagonisms between free conception and schematised formulation makes it extremely difficult for a single individual to indulge both activities. The artist-philosopher is indeed a rare combination. As such one would rank Plato, Goethe, Schiller, and perhaps a half dozen others, at most, in the world's history. To justify the inclusion of Robert Browning in this group is, to some extent at least, the purpose of the present study.

We are to deal with Browning's aesthetics. Now to understand any æsthetics requires a considerable knowledge of the general philosophy of the group or individual that

brings it to expression.¹ To an equal degree the understanding of an aesthetics presupposes a comprehensive grasp of the current theories of art from which it grew or to which, at any rate, it is closely associated in spirit and principles. These requirements seem to render advisable for our purpose: first, a preliminary survey of modern aesthetics before Browning and, second, a similar account of the poet's own general philosophy.

The inclusion of such preliminary studies has its disadvantages in that it burdens us with a sort of double introduction and so detracts and suspends attention from the main theme. It has the advantages, on the other hand, that these preliminary studies will lead to and throw light upon the main theme, and then, when that theme itself is before us, they will afford a body of theories to which references may be briefly and understandably made.

The account of modern aesthetics before Browning, which is to be presented in accordance with the ends above mentioned, is an attempt to bring forward in their proper connections the chief theories of the romanticists concerning art. I use the terms *modern* and *romantic* interchangeably here to signify what is generally recognized as a new attitude toward and understanding of the universe and life, an attitude begun in the eighteenth century, established in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and accepted without material changes in its fundamentals throughout the hundred years within which Browning lived and did his work. For the chief theories of the period concerning art I go chiefly to their most satisfactory formulations in the German philosophers from Herder to Schop-

1. From here throughout the term "philosophy" is used usually a little less than in the generic sense and to refer to the principles formulated for explaining the actual universe and its life,—matters pertaining chiefly to metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics. In the generic sense of the term aesthetics and all such bodies of theoretical principles are included under philosophy. I arbitrarily exclude the principles used in the explanation of art for the special purpose of contrasting Browning's aesthetics with his general philosophy otherwise.

enhauer. The scheme of presentation used with these theories is the same as that followed afterward in the presentation of Browning's theories,—a procedure that should suggest comparisons between the poet's theories and those of the preceding aestheticians even where the likenesses and differences are not specifically pointed out. Such a comparison is a frequent matter of reference throughout the body of the study and is made a special consideration in the concluding chapter.

The purposes of the study, as above specified, somewhat limit the exhaustive treatment of Browning's æsthetics which might be expected under the title chosen. Because of their minor importance, comparatively, only the general outlines of the modern aesthetics before Browning and of Browning's general philosophy are given, and so, to be in accordance with the treatment accorded these subjects, a survey of the whole of his aesthetics commends itself as a more fitting effort than exhaustive accounts of special matters would be. The lack as yet of any comprehensive studies of his art theories is also in support of our acceptance of the general survey method. Exhaustive studies of the poet's theories on particular matters such as the purposes, methods, or effects of art, for instance, can best be done separately and after the main outlines of his whole aesthetics are before us. It is on these grounds, at any rate, that the writer would justify the survey character of the present work.

2. Special Problems Involved.

So much for the general purpose and plan. But in determining what Browning's theories of art really are certain special problems immediately arise. In the first place, most of the great artist-philosophers presented their philosophy and aesthetics in special, separate works, while

Browning, except for a few prefaces, dedications, and his "Essay on Shelley," gave expression to his in his poetical works. Because of this fact the antagonisms between art and theory heretofore mentioned led to frequent questionings as to whether Browning's works were really philosophy, or art, or neither. The question whether they really contain an æsthetics is equally pertinent. That there is a philosophy in them has long since been established and that they embody an æsthetics it is our endeavor to show.

But these things accepted, the fact that most of the theories in Browning occur in a poetry still faces us with difficulties. Theories of themselves are formulated concepts, but when a poet uses them in genuine poetry they are thrown back into imaged and emotionalized forms for the senses as well as the intellect. The poet's gift that so objectified them and rendered them sensuous is always sure to be partially, if not altogether, lacking in the student, so the latter's attempt to reverse the poet's process and restore the pure concept is constantly in danger of warping the original idea to the bents of his own mind.

" As is your sort of mind,
So is your sort of search: you'll find
What you desire." 1

Nevertheless, when one finds an idea recurrent all the way from "Pauline" to "Asolando," issuing from various characters and out of all sorts of situations, yet remaining always the same, though variously phrased,—

" . . . Certain words, broad, plain,
Uttered again and yet again
Hard to mistake or overgloss." 2

why then, surely, one can be reasonably certain that he has hold of the theory expressed by Browning without any intermixture of his own preconceptions.

1. and 2. Easter-Day, VII-328 and VIII-329. The Roman numerals throughout the references give the numbers of the stanzas or parts of the poems; the Arabic ones give the page in the Cambridge Edition of Browning's Complete Works.

Where the theory in question occurs almost entirely in dramatic poetry, however, as in Browning's case, there remains the possibility that it is a theory of the dramatic character voicing it rather than Browning's own. But here, again, where the theory comes repeatedly from characters sympathetically drawn, and is clearly not the character's own distinctive view, nor an obvious or confessed sophistry for the moment's end, then certainly it is safe to take the theory in question as Browning's own conviction. He himself assures us that his own ideas are often put into the mouths of his characters¹ and the description that he has Balaustion offer as to her method would apply to his own procedure. About to begin her recitation of the "Alkestis" at Syracuse the Rhodian girl makes this confessional appeal,

" 'Tis the poet speaks:
But if I, too, should try and speak at times,
Leading your love to where my love, perchance,
Climbed earlier, found a nest before you knew—
Why, bear with the poor climber, for love's sake!" 2

The accuracy of attributing to Browning the opinions of his dramatic personages can often be tested, too, by reference to works in which he speaks in his own person. Many of the theories that he puts into the mouths of imaginary or historical characters he himself also gives expression to in prefaces, dedications, the "Essay on Shelley," and in poems or parts of poems altogether lacking in the dramatic element. What we know for his own opinion in these cases then becomes a check, also, upon what is otherwise only dramatically expressed.

In this whole matter, then, the theories voiced by Browning himself, whether elsewhere expressed by his dramatic personæ or not, and the theories in accord with these, though found only as the oft-repeated opinions of his vari-

1. Cf. *Letters of Browning*, ed. by Wise, Vol. I-80.

2. *Balaustion's Adventure*, 605.

ous characters,—all these one may indisputably accept as Browning's own. Out of these one may build what philosophy or aesthetics one can without danger from himself or from Browning's characters. From among these it has been our care to select in attempting to solve the special problems involved in the search for the poet's aesthetics.

Thus far we have been speaking only of the poet's æsthetic theory, but a question naturally arises, too, as to what is to be said with reference to his æsthetic practice. We shall have to answer that, for the most part, the matter is outside our concern. There are a few places, however, where his practice seems to contradict his theories, and a number of instances where it is in striking support of or offers distinctive supplement to those theories. In such cases his practice in art production throws light upon his theory and is deservedly a matter of comment, at least. Otherwise the whole matter is one for criticism rather than for aesthetics, as is shown by most of that large body of literature which has grown up about Browning's works.

3. Sources and Acknowledgments.

My indebtedness for the materials of the chapter on modern æsthetics before Browning is, chiefly, to the original or translated works of the aestheticians themselves. Several studies on the history and several on the general principles of aesthetics are also used. All these are listed in the Bibliography at the end of my study and acknowledgments are made throughout wherever the substance presented finds them due. The materials from Professor Parker's Lectures on the History of Aesthetics are from my own notes taken at the presentation of the lectures and indicate but slightly, if at all, how much I owe to him in this field.

On Browning's philosophy there is a considerable number of studies, the best of which will be found listed under

a proper head in the Bibliography. To their findings my account brings nothing new except its scheme of presentation and certain matters of emphasis. The works of Jones, Santayana, Brooke, and Burridge seem to me to be the best on the list. Dhruva's comparative study of Kant and Browning is excellent on the likenesses between the two, but fails to deal with the differences, a significant omission under the circumstances. The philosophers who deal with the subject almost unanimously disagree with the poet on the amount of relativity to be assigned to knowledge, but, for all their disagreement in details, the number and seriousness of their studies of his works and their direct acknowledgments, as well, both concede him a place among the meditative seekers after the truth.

On Browning's aesthetics the literature is extremely fragmentary and not at all extensive. There are no comprehensive studies of the subject, no works at all that are given entirely to its consideration. What there is of it is to be found in chapters, sections, and scattered statements in books and articles upon other phases or upon the general characteristics of Browning's works. There is not one whole article and scarcely a whole book chapter anywhere that pretends or proves to be purely a study of the theories on art expressed in the poet's works. In practically all instances where one does get a study that comes close to this sort of thing one finds that the chapter or article really deals only with some one phase of the aesthetics in question, and then more or less obscures that by failing to distinguish it from the philosophical theory with which it often occurs or from the critical tests of the poetry within which it lies.

The difficulties of determining Browning's theories have been pointed out, but it has not been granted that these are prohibitions, nor is it to be admitted that they justify an

indiscriminate mixing of his philosophy with his aesthetics and with the criticisms of his works. It seems reasonable to require that when a study presents Browning's ideas as to the nature of the universe and life it should recognize and present them as such; that when its offerings are Browning's ideas concerning the nature of those images of the universe and its life which are art, then this fact should be evident; and that wherever the study contains estimates of Browning's works, whether in the light of his own theories or in accordance with principles otherwise proper to test them by, then, here too, the materials presented should be clearly recognizable for what they are. Such a requirement does not at all prevent one from including any or all of the things here mentioned in a single study of the poet's works, if one so desires. It does make certain that to offer a random, mixed collection of all of them will never give Browning's philosophy, nor his aesthetics, nor a genuine criticism of his poetry. And it is because it offers just this heterogeneous sort of thing that a large part of the literature on Browning's aesthetics is so unsatisfying and confusing.

The criticism just given is, perhaps, too severe. There are good things in the books, chapters, and articles referred to, and it is chiefly our own peculiar ends that they so poorly serve. Several of the biographies on Browning do contain most of his theories on art, and a number of the handbooks do likewise. It would be impossible, of course, for such works to do more than point out the theories as they were come upon and in the order that the scheme of the works themselves dictated.

Then there is a large group of chapters and articles on special subjects with reference to Browning,—such, for example as the use of the grotesque and the idea of personality in his works,—which often present directly or throw light

upon his aesthetic theories. There is, likewise, a considerable group of chapters and articles on his theory or practice with respect to the various arts, such as drama, painting, and music, for instance. Finally, there is a small number of chapters and parts of works which attempt to deal with the fundamental principles of his art theory and with their relation to his philosophical principles. Owing to their brevity and to the other interests of their authors these attempts do not at all aim at nor attain to a complete survey of Browning's aesthetics. For what they do give, however, they are well worth study. Among the several kinds of works on the subject at hand, in the classification of which I have ranged them last, they are undoubtedly the best.

A representative group of the works just now referred to will be found listed under suggestive headings in the Bibliography. Out of all the works there cited, by sorting through all sorts of materials, one could, no doubt, piece together a quite complete survey of Browning's aesthetics. But even so, one would have gotten the theories only at second hand. For our ends one does far better to spend one's time reading Browning himself, and to do what sorting out of theories is necessary from the vantage ground of their original settings. The Complete Works of Browning certainly comprise by far the better part of any possible bibliography on Browning's aesthetics.

In the study of Browning, as in that of the aesthetics before his time, I am indebted for much beyond what the books had to offer. For direction toward the varied pleasures in the poet's works and for guidance in the efforts that have made this study possible I owe to Professor Strauss more than any amount of notated acknowledgments could indicate. To the attitude and spirit of work taken with him and with Professor Parker I owe the orig-

inal interest in the subject in hand. To these things and to their helpful suggestions it is largely due if a glimpse of Browning's aesthetics is offered that is not without value and appreciation among students of aesthetics and lovers of Browning's poetry. What I owe otherwise and elsewhere, to books or to men, will be felt to be paid, I hope, by that silent appreciation for any and all assistance which lies in every high purpose itself.

CHAPTER I.

THE CHIEF THEORIES OF MODERN AESTHETICS BEFORE BROWNING.

1. The Occasion and Origin of Modern Aesthetics.

The thorough-going changes which come at long intervals in man's attitude toward his universe, himself, and a Power of some sort over both are at once assisted by and reflected in the contemporary art and art theory. It is generally accepted that Romanticism was a change of this sort and that the term fairly well designates the mind and spirit activities of the world order since the middle of the eighteenth century.

The occasion for the new attitude lay in the dualism that had previously developed between the sphere of sense and feeling and that of thought. Between the renaissance and romanticism came an autocratic interval during which there was "An attempt to carry out in a systematic manner, and with the help of natural science,—a critical examination of the outer and inner world before the supreme tribunal of the reason."¹ As a consequence of this attempt the world came to be regarded merely as a vast mechanism in which the spontaneous activity and self-assertion of the individual had little or no place. Dogmatism everywhere, and especially in philosophy and art, hemmed in the instincts for the preservation and expression of the human self. Abstract reason set up a world seemingly closed and antagonistic to practical life and its universe and, among other

1. Francke, Kuno: *Social Forces in German Literature*, 176.

inflexible creeds, dictated the rules for an art suitable to its scheme of things.

Whatever other ends it had, the philosophy of romanticism was preëminently an attempt to meet and solve the dualism of the Cartesian, rationalistic philosophy just described. It had its origin and various developments in the eighteenth century, but its comprehensive formulation of principles in the various branches of philosophy came later. Its systematic aesthetics was the work of those first three decades of the nineteenth century which immediately preceded the appearance of Robert Browning's works. Due to these facts and to the consequent natural agreement of most of Browning's theories with those of romanticism, as I have described it, a brief survey of the fundamental principles of this modern aesthetics seems a preliminary necessity to the study which our title proposes. Preparatory for an understanding of this romantic aesthetics a terse account of the general philosophy of the modern aestheticians seems advisable at this point.

2. The General Philosophy of Modern Aestheticians.

Efforts to escape the conclusions of any philosophy are inherent in knowledge itself. The way of escape inevitably leads back to the origins of knowledge in sensations and feelings. The eighteenth century attempts to escape dualism came in this way and the first steps lay in the direction of finding some second or third form of knowledge that would serve to mediate between the empirical and the rational. To this end Baumgarten found a form of knowledge that he held to be purely sensuous and gotten by intuition rather than by analytic and synthetic processes; and to this end also Lord Kaimes claimed that even relative qualities of objects, by repeated experience with them, might become intrinsic, that is, immediately apprehensible

and the objects of intuitive knowledge. Otherwise it was variously held that there are two kinds of knowledge, clear and confused, and that a third kind, composed of clear but not distinct concepts, operates between these two and gives an indistinct perception of the world order.¹

So one way and another sensations and feelings were re-instated as essential elements of knowledge itself, and the immediate, intuitive apprehension of things was recognized as one of the necessary mental processes for a full appraisal of the world. This recognition at once admitted a whole new realm of things as possible objects of knowledge. The beauty and apparent purpose of nature claimed attention; man's self, his feelings and imaginings as well as his reasonings, pressed to be known; and likewise the Power that seemed common to both nature and man, the unifying and controlling force or essence of them both, crowded close for study and explanation wherever intuitive apprehensions were accredited.

By this course of thought, then, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries came to a very general monistic conception of the universe. Every antithesis was thus found healed by the discovery of identical elements in all things, though a warning against the over-emphasis of knowledge still indicated a remembrance of the rationalistic opposition. Man now began to explain nature and all outside himself, even God the central essence, in terms of himself, anthropomorphically, and, on the same ground, to feel himself into all things, ascribing to them a life and an essence like his own.² In this way the inner nature of all things was identified and the inevitable corollary followed that this inner essence was indivisible.

Knowledge of the inner nature of things now again came

1. Parker, D. H.: *Lectures on the History of Aesthetics*. 3/19/20.

2. Herder, J. F.: *Von Erkennen und Empfinden in der Menschlichen Seele*, and *Uebers Erkennen und Empfinden*, etc., *Werke*, Band VIII-169 to 262.

to be regarded as intuitive Ideas,—in the Platonic sense,—as things composed of the central essence itself, but things known as particularized objects only so far as they manifested the essence embodied in materials under time, space, and cause relations. Schelling's account of the Circle Idea¹ is especially clarifying as to the relations thought to exist between the absolute essence and its outward manifestation. The Circle Idea, he explains, exists everywhere and always, but it exists also in any particular circle. Here, then, an eternal and absolute thing appears in time and place, yet is unconditioned by these, since the Circle Idea nowise disappears when this particular circle is wiped out. The inner absolute essence is without relations or conditions and through Ideas intuitively apprehended we attain to knowledge of this inner nature of things.

The anthropomorphic interpretation of the universe made man supreme save as he recognized the whole absolute essence, designated God or otherwise, as greater than the part, himself; but it especially exalted this part, the individual, since the universe was looked upon as the individual's own imaginative creation and, also, as a thing fashioned by analogy to his own inner nature.² Such an interpretation also exalted the place of sensation, feeling, and imagination in all experiences. It then became a basic theory for all romantic philosophy, by use of which all the human activities found a common unifying principle and were often identified thereby in the philosophical systems of the times.³ So the Good, for example, came to be identified with Truth, Beauty, and the rest,—and the world wherein these identities were comprehended and explained was generally conceived as good or capable of being found

1. Schelling, J.: *Philosophie der Kunst*, S.W., Band V-368.

2. Schlegel, F.: *Lyceumfragmente and Athenaeumfragmente*, in *Prosaischen Jugendschriften*, ed. by Minor, Vol. II—189 and 201; *Ideen*, in the *Athenaeum*, Dritten Bandes, Erstes Stück, II-4 ff.

3. Cf. esp. Schlegel; *op. cit.*, and Schelling; *Philosophie der Kunst*.

so by human life. Finally, and on the basis of such a belief, man's higher activities,—science, morality, religion, philosophy, and art,—were all held to lie in the direction of discovering the common essence, the unity of all things, and man's own Oneness with the world.

3. The Place of Beauty and Art in the Modern World.

The special work of romanticism, as before stated, was that of healing the antitheses of its preceding philosophy. This was all the more true of the aesthetics of the time, since the problems of the beautiful bring their own antitheses in addition to these of general philosophy. The main effort of art, however, as the modern aestheticians saw it, was to work,—in its own way, to be sure,—upon the same fundamental problems of life as those with which man's higher activities generally were concerned. Its mediating role was early indicated when it was held to be a middle stage in the rise of the race from the common life of the senses to the higher life discovered by man in the paths of science and philosophy. The difference thus early between romanticism and rationalism was that the former insisted upon an autonomy for art and a unique function, as opposed to art's subordination under science and philosophy in the direct service of truth.¹

The first systematic attempt to solve the rationalistic-romantic conflict in aesthetics has been generally credited to Immanuel Kant. His main consideration was for natural beauty rather than for art. The appreciation of beauty he explained as a matter of aesthetic judgment, a faculty which he described as one capable of finding in the beautiful objects a satisfaction at once disinterested, universally valid, purposive without a concept of purpose, and uni-

1. Parker: *Lectures*, 3/19/20,—Bosanquet: *History of Aesthetics*; Chapter VIII,—and Croce: *Aesthetics*, *Hist. Summ.*, 81-272.

versally necessary. And such satisfactions, says Kant, the aesthetic judgment must and can find without any necessary charm for the senses, arousal of emotions, or transfer of definite concepts from beautiful objects. But even under these restrictions Kant allows beauty a broadening influence upon human knowledge, partly on the ground of the empirical, intellectual, and moral interests it is permitted to carry along with its aesthetic ones and, partly too, because of its enlarging effect upon the concepts by the free play of the imagination.¹

Most of those who contributed largely to the systematization of modern aesthetics were more generous than Kant in the role ascribed to art. They jointly or severally held that art, by its sensation and feeling elements, holds life in the concepts of knowledge and so prevents them from becoming dead abstractions; that it reminds us of and interprets nature to us; that it deals with the wholeness of the universe and human life and is therefore a part of the art of life and of the knowledge of man; and that it mediates the divine essence of things and of men to those not capable of apprehending this for themselves, thereby raising humanity to the level of its meditating geniuses. It is generally agreed among them that art is a means to knowledge of the inner nature of all things, the essence of Ideas, and that it surpasses the beauty of nature to this end in that it takes the Ideas out of the actual into representations wherein they are more easily apprehended.²

It is evident in the above that the mediating role of art is constantly insisted upon. This function is given special treatment and explanation in the aesthetics of both

1. Kant, I.: *Critique of Judgment*, Bernard's translation, 197. Cf. also Bernard's Intro., p. XXIV and Parker: *Lectures*, 4/23/20.
2. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 170. Schlegel: *Ideen*, 15. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 384, and *The Relation of the Plastic Arts to Nature*, 112. Hegel: *Intro. to the Phil. of Fine Art*, 105-6.

Schelling and Hegel. The latter begins his work by naming and locating the various antitheses of nature and life and then proceeds to show that truth lies in mediation and conciliation between these and that it is the very nature of art thus to mediate and conciliate, since art takes Ideas, things by nature opposed to limiting embodiments, and so sets them forth in sensuous mediums as to have them appear at once reconciled and in harmony.¹ Likewise a reconciling effect is indicated, too, by the frequent embodiment of two or more antagonistic Ideas within a single art form, the embodiment being done in such a manner that the formerly antagonistic Ideas now seem to be brought into harmony by art. Schelling's account of the solution of the knowledge-action antithesis by art is helpful in understanding what is meant by such reconciliations. He explains that in various arts thought or knowledge is shown in interplay with action in the characters portrayed. So far as these characters become real to us in drama or other arts, to that extent one sees action interpenetrated with knowledge, or knowledge gone over into action, the two acting in entire harmony and united in a single art object.²

Art is only one of the higher activities of man and is considered by the aestheticians under study as having its mediating function in common with science, morality, religion, and philosophy. Among these other activities for solving the problems of life and the universe art is uniformly given high place. In one or two instances it is given highest position, in several it ranks second only to philosophy, and in one case it is clearly put next under religion.³ Wherever it is thought to be excelled by other

1. Hegel: *Intro. to the Phil. of Fine Art*, 100-5.

2. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 384.

3. Schiller clearly and Schlegel qualifiedly in the first instance; Hegel clearly and Schelling qualifiedly in the second; and Schopenhauer in the last. Schlegel seems partly to agree with Schopenhauer, but by religion he appears really to mean a sort of poetry.

activities its limitations are assigned to its sensuous mediums. But even admitting its inability to escape the restrictions of concrete forms, art is still recognized by all the great romantic aestheticians except one as a powerful means for finding life in the universe good and for impelling efforts to understand and enjoy the world. In the one lone case, that of Schopenhauer, art is considered a means for building a transcendent realm that is good and to which one may escape from a world that is otherwise altogether evil, a world that is represented as evil even in the art by which the escape is supposed to be effected.¹

4. Theories as to the Artist.

A. Physical Characteristics and Life.

Artists have always been looked upon as somewhat different creatures from ordinary persons. They have been expected to be distinctive of appearance, temperamental, and unconventional. The exaltation of the self and the individual by romanticism accentuated this attitude. The aesthetics of the period regularly represented the artist as a man apart, endowed with special gifts.

Further, the artistic nature was held to show especially in the features. Even the physique throughout was considered indicative of the sort of work produced, since the artist's creative product was thought to be conceived always by analogy to himself.² In his way of life the artist is looked upon as a Brahmin of a higher caste, requiring a distinct outer life as he has a distinct inner one.³ In conduct he is impracticable, unreasonable, and irrational as to the passions. He has an aversion for the exact sci-

1. Schopenhauer: *The World as Will and Idea*, tr. by Haldane and Kemp; Vol. I—239 and 346.

2. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 258. Schelling: *The Plastic Arts*, 127. Hegel: *Intro. to Fine Arts*, 60.

3. Schlegel: *Ideen*, 15.

ences. His nature is akin to madness in his failure to see and observe the practical relations of things.¹

B. The Self: Creativeness and Originality.

The stress upon individuality is seen further in the notion that humanity is raised to the status of the individual by the means of art, and in the *Romantic Irony* and *Play* theories, which will be discussed hereafter in their proper connections. It is evident, too, in the idea that artists are mediators of the divine to those not able to apprehend it for themselves.² The theory concerning the annihilation of the self by the artist might seem in opposition to all this, but it is really quite in accord, for it means merely that the aesthetic attitude is a rising above self into oneness with the essence of the beautiful object, which essence is one with the artist's own inner being, the revelation of which is, therefore, a revelation of the artist to himself.³

The reason for the productive nature of the artist is variously explained. Schelling maintains that man himself is an Idea from God, the source of all Ideas, and that the essential nature of such Ideas is activity and productivity.⁴ Schiller attributes artistic expression to a play impulse in man which brings into harmony his life and form impulses.⁵ Hegel and others find that there is a universal need of expression among men and that the artist's work is merely the special form of expression that his peculiar endowment compels him to use.⁶ Throughout all the accounts the creative and productive nature by which art

1. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 244.

2. Schlegel, as above.

3. Schlegel: *Ideen*, 27. Schopenhauer, *op. cit.* 233.

4. Schelling: *Plastic Arts*, 459.

5. Schiller: *Letters on Aes. Educ.*, Nos. 14 and 15.

6. Hegel: *Intro. to Fine Arts*, 57-60.

appears is everywhere credited to an inner necessity arising from the special gifts of the artist.

As to what is meant by the creative and original features of the artist's work little is said in romantic aesthetics. The creative force of the artist is said to act unconsciously, as does the life force in nature, and the artist is supposed to add his conscious activity merely for his technical ends.¹ The art work is elsewhere held to be a creation in conformity with the universal need of the divine faculty in man for self-expression.² As to the matter of originality, Kant defines genius as a faculty for work of an original nature and Schlegel defines the artist as "One who has — an original view of the endless."³ But this and what went with it says nothing as to how the work is original and a creation. On the latter point, at least, we shall find a distinct contribution in Browning's aesthetics.

C. Genius.

The special gift accredited to artists in the period under study is almost invariably designated as genius. This is defined as an ability to make something independent of rules; a faculty for producing works of originality, of an exemplary character, and of incommunicable methods; a gift rooted in nature, of which it shows the unconscious power, and the special organ of the fine arts; a power for the apprehension and representation of aesthetic Ideas.⁴

This gift of genius is held to be a natural or divine endowment, not self-attainable, but open to development, and requiring favorable conditions to reach exerciseable proportions.⁵ Its intermittent operation is acknowledged

1. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 384.

2. Hegel: *As above*.

3. Schlegel: *Ideen*, 15.

4. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, 188-9.

5. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 258-260.

and the faculty of genius is therefore often regarded as a matter of inspiration.¹ Different degrees of the power of genius are recognized, but classes are named in only one case where a distinction is made between deep and lively genius.

Further, genius is thought to be operative exclusively in art and is thus distinguished from the faculty for science and the intellectual world. It is also distinguished from talent on the ground that it is a natural gift whereas talent is merely a self-attainable skill.²

Finally, genius is also differentiated from the imagination, although the latter is held to be an essential element of the former. Genius is said to go beyond the imagination in its intensity and continuity of power for apprehending the Ideas in things and thereby attains the added ability of putting its apprehensions into sensuous media for communication to others.³

D. Imagination.

Except in rationalistic eras the imagination has quite consistently been given a high place among artistic gifts. Romantic aesthetics did little more than to reaffirm this status, though there are certain modifications to be noted.

Where the sense and feeling elements were largely excluded from art and concepts were also barred there remained little but the imaginative elements to rest upon. Consequently Kant explains the aesthetic judgment as a free play of the imagination with the understanding. He says that the imagination chooses to play with the intellect, incites the latter to order and classify in an attempt to discover the rule, but always leaves it baffled in this attempt. In the production of art he describes the imagi-

1. Schopenhauer: *The World as Will and Idea*, 241.

2. Hegel: *Intro. to Fine Arts*, 52.

3. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 252.

nation as a faculty to whose intuitions no concepts are adequate, intuitions which he calls aesthetic Ideas and whose objectifications into sense mediums constitute art works.¹

The above description of the imaginative faculty would be quite in agreement with that of Kant's fellow aestheticians except for the exclusive place given it in art to the neglect of the sense and feeling elements. One of his contemporaries holds it to be the image-making faculty that takes the sense and feeling elements up into the soul and builds therefrom an image of the soul's own creative power and, by analogy, an image of the whole creative process of nature.² Somewhat later it is credited with imaging-into-one the Ideas of things and the forms fit to embody them.³ These views and others closely like them regularly consider the imagination to be the conceiving faculty as distinguished from the executorial one in art production.

The only distinction made between the imagination and other faculties of the artist is that with reference to genius above noted. In this distinction the imagination is made the faculty that apprehends the Ideas and, as such, it is found operative independent of genius in the appreciation of beauty generally. In the artist it is said to assist genius in two ways; it extends knowledge to objects beyond the perceptive experience — and it also enables the genius to see the imperfections of nature in contrast to the perfections she intends but always fails to some degree in achieving. It thus extends the genius's knowledge of objects beyond his perceptive experience both as to quantity and quality.⁴

1. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, 197

2. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 241.

3. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 386.

4. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 241.

E. Romantic Irony.

It is already evident that the stress put upon individuality by early romanticism had various issues in modern aesthetic theory. Two of these that have to do particularly with the artist claim the concluding divisions of the present section of our study.

"The subjective Idealism of Fichte," says Croce,¹ "generated an aesthetic; that of irony as the base of art. 'The 'I' that created the universe can also destroy it. 'The universe is a vain appearance, smiled at by the Ego, its creator, who surveys it as an artist his work, from without and above. For Friedrich Schlegel, art was a perpetual farce, a parody of itself: and Tieck defined Irony as a force which allows the poet to dominate his material.'"

The above is a somewhat exaggerated description of Schlegel's Romantic Irony Theory,² but it does indicate the individualistic origin and other chief features of the theory which Solger as well as Tieck adopted. The anthropomorphic interpretation of the universe led quite naturally to an idealistic view of the world and, in its extreme form, this view represented the world to be merely the expression of the human self. The world so regarded becomes a sort of poetic creation out of one's own imagination, a work of art in itself, and a thing to which one is superior because it is his own and so only a part of himself.

In a like manner, according to the Romantic Irony theory, the genius creates works of art and is superior to any and all of them, since he never expresses all of himself in them. Knowing something of himself to be always left over he stands aloof, to play with his imaginative cre-

1. Croce: *Aesthetic*, 302.

2. Schlegel: *Athenaeumfragmente* and *Lyceumfragmente*, in *Prosaischen Jugendchriften*, 188, 198, 211, 222, and 253, especially.

ations like a God playing with the world of his making. It is thought, too, that men play in this same fashion with their lives, feeling aloof to their acts, and in this the theory is carried over by Schlegel into the moral sphere. As a principle in romantic aesthetics the theory had little credence except with the men mentioned, but it is significant as an issue from the exaltation of the individual in that aesthetics and, in that connection, with certain of Browning's theories as to the artistic nature and gifts.

F. The Play Theory.

Somewhat less directly than Romantic Irony the Play Theory concerning art production had its origin, also, in the romantic individualism. The theory is developed only by Schiller,¹ but there are hints of it already in Kant and Schlegel. The former classes music and humour as forms of play with Aesthetic Ideas;² the latter, as we have just seen, called the work of the artist and even the world itself a play of man with his imaginative creations.³

The play principle is the central proposition of Schiller's whole aesthetic theory. His explanation of the beautiful is put upon three impulses of man that correspond closely to the savage, barbaric, and civilized phases which he finds in human development generally. There is, first, a sensuous or life impulse which seeks self-realization for the individual. Then, from the rational nature, comes a form impulse which seeks to give permanence to what man has already achieved and to bring harmony among the diversity of this achievement. The reconciliation of these two, never fully attained, is attempted and partly realized by a play impulse. By this impulse man becomes conscious at

1. Schiller: *Letters on Aes. Educ.*, Nos. 14, 15, and 27.

2. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, 223.

3. Somewhat later Schopenhauer (*Will and Idea*, 241) attributed the exhibition of genius to a superfluous power of knowledge over and above that required in the service of the Will.

once of his being in form, of his spirit in flesh; he has an intuition of his humanity and gives this intuition embodiment in an object, a work of art, which thus becomes a symbol of man's destiny, an emblem of man's whole being.

Where life and form impulses work in harmony there such a form is imposed upon life as life itself would choose. In art as in play one has the choice of playing, of producing, or not, but having chosen the positive course he at once chooses, also, to abide by the rules of the game, the requirements of the medium in which the work appears. Genuine freedom is here attained in the play of art,—for here there is not an absence of law and order, but here alone one finds that full harmony of a law and order chosen by accord. The play theory is sometimes objected to on the ground that it fails to distinguish between play in art where a permanent product issues and play in the sense of games where there is no residual object, but there can be little mistaking of Schiller's meaning. His application of the principle in the ennobling of character and the aesthetic education of man belongs properly to the appreciation and effects of art and will be discussed in that connection. His freely-chosen-form idea is a distinct advance over Kant's form-you-can't-formulate¹ and will be considered in its proper association with the romantic theories concerning the work of art itself, which theories now become the subject of our inquiry.

5. Theories as to the Work of Art.

A. General Characteristics.

The rationalists and even some of the early romantic aestheticians still regarded the work of art as a servant of science and philosophy in the communication of truth, and,

1. Kant: Critique of Judgment, 126.

as such, of and for the intellect.¹ By the time of the great aestheticians of the early nineteenth century it was everywhere acknowledged to be a work embodying the inner nature of things in a permanent sensuous medium, of and for life as a whole, intuitive in its conception and effect, and spontaneously enjoyable without any comparative judgments as to utility or reflective tests of the intellectual or moral faculties whatever. The chief theories on the whole matter can best be gotten at, perhaps, by examining them separately with reference to the materials, the methods, the purposes, and the classifications assigned to the works of art.

B. The Materials of Art.

The notion that it is a mere means to knowledge allowed art only the formal and conceptual primary elements appellant to the intellect. As soon as the work was taken to be of significance for the whole man it had at once, also, to be credited with elements for all his faculties. Consequently, in the great systems of what is interchangeably called romantic and modern aesthetics, all four of the common elements of experience,—sensations, feelings, images, and concepts,—were acknowledged and found bound up together in the art work. In these systems the sense elements were sometimes identified with charm, but more often charm and grace were found quite closely identical as a combination, in either case, of the sense and emotional elements. The two were generally thought to be involved with sense and feeling among the primary elements and at least compatible with the others in the art product.²

The proper content of art works, a thing achieved by

1. Parker: *Lectures*, 3/19/20. Bosanquet: *Hist. of Aes.*, Chap. VIII.

2. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, 72. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 183. Schelling: *Plastic Arts*, 127. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 268 and 289.

part or all of the primary elements, has, since Plato's time and wherever the formal qualities were not given exclusive place, been believed to be Ideas of some character or other. So far as the rationalists agreed with this they, of course, defined Ideas as mere concepts for the intellect. The Platonic Ideas, however, meant much more than this, and it was quite the Platonic Ideas which were accepted as the fit content for art by the aesthetics under investigation.

The first part of this romantic period took this content to be some sort of knowledge lying between sense material and concepts and it was still this sort of thing that Kant called Aesthetic Ideas.¹ As the anthropomorphic and monistic attitude gained ground all four of the experience elements came to be found in the Ideas. Such Ideas were then thought to comprise the essence of things and to have unconditioned manifestation in external objects after the fashion explained in the Schelling account of the Circle Idea.² So far as art is able to use these Ideas it necessarily, because of its very nature, finds and employs them only where they are thus externally manifested in a fit sense medium.³

It is readily understood how, in the above sense, everything from inanimate objects to human thought and spirit, and even to Gods, may be apprehended as Ideas for art, provided only that they are conceivable in sensuous embodiments, the only form in which we can know them as art objects. It was through such an apprehension of their Gods that the ancients came to render permanently accessible in art their polytheistic hierarchies. But some of the romantic aestheticians believed that the Ideas have development also and might even attain stages in which no

1. Kant, *op. cit.*, 197

2. Cf. above, p. 4.

3. Schelling's and Hegel's works are best on these matters.

fit sensuous forms, adequate to their full manifestation, were known. The complex modern life and character, the human soul, and the Christian God Ideas were cited as examples of this. The last of the Ideas just cited was held to be entirely beyond artistic representation and the others were either regarded as the content of the highest art or else of an art that really transcended art's possibilities. Schelling called art of such a content a subordination of the finite form to the infinite Idea,¹ while Hegel said that an art where the media were not adequate to the Ideas was Romantic Art and to be found at the end stage of art development, since its appearance indicated that man's thought and spirit had outrun the sensuous shapes of his conception.²

For most of the aestheticians under study the source of the content of art, that is, of the Ideas just described, lies in the world generally. It is a matter of fact, however, that large bodies of such Ideas have grown up and been generally accepted as capable of giving a complete interpretation of the universe to their times. Schelling calls these Ideas the Ideas of philosophy and goes on to show that separately and in groups they tend to be imaged by man as real, living, and existing, whereby they become living Gods to those who so image them. Taken all together the Ideas of an individual or a people has make up the mythology of that individual or people, for mythology in this sense,—the only true sense according to Schelling,—means just the whole store of Ideas concerning the universe held by mankind.³ The modern world is thought to have no such mythology because its religion is mystic and monotheistic and so has no sensuously conceived epic figures such as go to make up a mythology. The mod-

1. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 372. *Plastic Arts*, 127 ff.

2. Hegel: *Intro. to FineArts*, 138 ff. Also below, p. 27.

3. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 379 and 380.

ern world is also considered to be an individual rather than a racial or group world, so each man builds his own universe, his own store of Ideas, his own mythology, and thus originality becomes the ground law of modern art; for mythology in the sense it is here understood must contain all the materials of art, since the content of art is just those Ideas which go to make up mythology. Modern art therefore makes as well as uses its own Ideas. Dante, Shakespeare, and Calderon are especially cited by Schelling as men who so created and employed mythologies of their own in art works.

As characteristics of the objects of art the sublime and beautiful are kinds or, at least, qualities of Ideas and, as such, claim consideration among the materials of art. The distinction between the two in modern aesthetics seems to have begun with the differentiation between beauty and grandeur by the early modern English aestheticians.¹ This differentiation agrees with Burke's account of the Sublime and the Beautiful in ascribing an element of size plus that of beauty to Sublimity, by which added element the sublime gives emotions of expansion and seriousness. The sublime is also held to manifest an amount of disorder and formlessness incompatible with beauty and Burke relates it to the instinct of self-preservation in contrast to the connection he finds between beauty and the instinct of sociability.² Kant's account of this matter agrees on the points mentioned, but goes on to a distinction between two kinds of the sublime, the mathematical and the dynamic, the first of which he finds in objects of immense size and the second in those manifesting vast might and power.³ It is already a point made in Kant's account, but one more clearly dealt with by Schopenhauer,⁴ that beautiful objects invite con-

1. Parker: *Lectures*, 3/22/20. Bosanquet: *Hist. of Aes.*, 203.

2. Burke: *The Sublime and the Beautiful*, 72 ff.

3. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, 175 ff.

4. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 268-9.

templation while sublime ones have a hostile and threatening aspect that first repels, but is directly overcome, and so lends force to appreciation. The rising above or overcoming of an antagonistic force in the object by the person having the aesthetic experience is then considered an added element in the case of the sublime. Schopenhauer's application of the principle of the sublime to human character in art opens the way for viewing evil as the hostile element over which the character triumphs in attaining sublimity. Except for the last mentioned point the theories here set forth are the current romantic ones as to the sublime and the beautiful.

Again, the Ugly and the Evil were also usually held by the romantic aestheticians to be qualities comprised in the essence of objects and so connected with Ideas as materials for art.¹ At first the Ugly was sometimes taken to be what deviated from the norm and what was, therefore, incompatible with beauty; but this characteristic formalism soon lost ground and the Ugly was found permissible in art, since art is only a representation and so not identified with the ugly object. Only the Ugly which arouses disgust is excluded, and this for the reason that it causes the identification just mentioned.

The aestheticians who included the Evil as a material of art did so usually upon the ground that it is an inherent part of the order of things.² As such it is found usable in art as a mere foil to enhance the appreciation of the beautiful as good, in which role it appears chiefly in comedy. It was thought better used, however, as a positive though dependent thing in itself against which the good strives and triumphs, thus affording a strife and a triumph which is found beautiful when represented in art. In this use

1. Cf. Rosenkranz: *Aesthetik des Hässlichen*.

2. Bosanquet: *Hist. of Aes.*, 300, 355. Parker: *Lectures*, 3/22/20. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 269 and also *Supplements to Book III*, 218.

it appears chiefly in drama and is always present in great pathos and great tragedy.

With the Ugly and Evil usable in art as above indicated, and with both of them considered as inherent in the scheme of things, both then became proper materials of art, since it is the business of art to represent that order or scheme of things in its entirety and to represent it as chiefly beautiful and good, or capable of being found so. Because of its mediating methods art can use such adverse elements and even make them assist toward the optimistic view of the universe. And where the world is considered as originally and altogether evil, here art is said to so represent the world, too; but here, by those who believe in this fashion, it is insisted upon, further, that by art's very reconciliations and triumphs in a discordant, ugly, and evil world art itself becomes a realm that transcends, a realm good and beautiful in itself.

Except where the Ugly and the Evil were identified by considering Evil merely as the spiritually Ugly, the theory and practice of romantic art both seem to agree that the Ugly is best used in painting and the Evil in drama. It is the usual opinion also that both of them become increasingly usable in the higher arts.¹

C. The Methods of Art.

The chief consideration in connection with the methods of art is that concerning the embodiment of the Idea content in a sensuous medium. The modern aesthetics early gave study to the media of art and found that these of themselves seemed to carry emotional and imaginative qualities.² Shortly it was being asserted that art is a language using signs or symbols of expression and that every such sign must be like the thing signified.³ Out of

1. Rosenkranz: *Aes. des Hässlichen*, 27 and 47.

2. Burke: *The Sublime and Beautiful*, 201 ff.

3. Lessing: *Laocöon*, 91.

these notions and the Idea content theory grew the fundamental principle of all romantic aesthetics, a principle to the effect that the work of art is to give conscious expression in fit, sensibly accessible mediums to the Ideas found in the universe and that the degree to which this is achieved is the basis for the classification of the arts.

The notion that the form, the sign or symbol, must be like the thing signified also prepared for the theory that this form developed with and out of the Idea itself. It was then variously designated as, a form-one-can't-formulate, a freely-chosen form, a measure which creative energy as Idea freely imposes upon itself.¹ Art was then described as an image of the Ideas and forms in their mutual development, an image of the progressively objectified Will.²

Because the mutually developing Ideas and forms are harmonized in the art product it is the very nature of art's method to mediate and reconcile antitheses. This effect comes from the harmonizing of the Ideas with their mediums of representation. The various antitheses resolved in this manner are from all fields of life and its stuffs, consequently art assists in the representation and interpretation of life as a whole. The Ideas,—which represent the general, universal, free, ideal, essence, spirit, infinite, divine,—are seen in art as at once reconciled and at home in their embodiments,—which represent the particular, individual, conditioned, real, shape, flesh, finite, natural, and human.

The theory of the characteristic in art is connected by modern aesthetics with that concerning the mutually adequate and evolutionary Ideas and forms and, as such, is properly treated as a method of art. The theory comes

1. Kant: Critique of Judgment. Schiller: Letters on Aes. Educ. Schelling: Plastic Arts.
2. Schopenhauer: Will and Idea, 269.

out of the notion that in nature or art the form an object takes necessarily grows out of the essence itself. The characteristic in such an object appears as that freely chosen measure or form quality taken by the Ideas. It will appear as the individual or species in nature, then, and as the representation of one or both of these in art.¹

The symbolic and the allegoric may also be considered as art methods, since they also have to do with the degree of harmony attained between Ideas and their sense media. This is evident for the symbolic in Kant's notion that such evil as war may be treated symbolically in art, personified as Mars, for instance.² It is clearer still in the quite general notion among the aestheticians under study that in art the inner powers give the symbol,—which is caught by analogy to the human body and its members,—to the Ideas from the external world and that all art is, in a sense, a symbol for the interpretation of the universe.³ The world is often considered an allegorical one, too, out of which art creates its works to remind us of nature and life.⁴ Hegel's treatment of symbolic art as that art in which the Idea is inadequate to the form and Schopenhauer's theory to the effect that poetry uses concepts allegorically are both to the present point, also. Both symbolism and allegory are likewise involved in the classifications of the arts and the theories of Hegel and Schopenhauer just mentioned will be more fully presented in that connection.

D. The Purposes of Art.⁵

The communication of truth has already been pointed out as the purpose assigned to art by the rationalists. The early modern aesthetics sometimes required that the

1. Schelling: *Plastic Arts*, 112-13.

2. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, 195.

3. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 250.

4. Schlegel: *Ideen*, 8.

5. Cf. Parker: *Prin. of Aes.*, Chaps. XIV and XV.

beautiful object be an image of utility and held that art is a mid-step from the life of the senses toward the higher life of the reason. The latter opinion is still largely Kant's position, but he allows that art may carry intellectual and moral interests, though these are not connected with the judgments as to its beauty.¹ These and other points to be mentioned directly make it evident that practically all the older theories as to the purpose of art had modification or amplification in the period under study. The expression theory and the notion that art's purpose is the representation and interpretation of life as a whole for life as a whole had their origin in this period.

The imitation of nature is accepted by romantic aesthetics as a fit purpose for art, but the mere copy aspect of the theory is here excluded in favor of a selective one and the imitation theory is taken to mean only that natural shapes are an essential element to the end that the representation attempted shall be in a fit medium. The purely hedonistic purpose for art is not recognized in this period either, for though the pleasure in art is constantly insisted upon it is required that the pleasure be for life as a whole. Likewise the purgation theory, which is akin to both the hedonistic and moral theories, gains little credence from the romanticists.² Schopenhauer's escape theory whereby art is thought to be a way to occasional consolation in an evil world³ is also related to hedonism, but it is by no means that theory. Yet this like the other theories just mentioned is a direct outgrowth in the romantic period of theories that had their origin in an earlier time.

The expression theory as to the purpose of art, so forcibly advanced by certain present day aestheticians⁴ had

1. Kant: Critique of Judgment, 174 and 280. Cf. also Parker: Lectures, 3/22/20.
2. Cf. esp. Hegel: Intro. to Fine Arts, 97.
3. Schopenhauer: Will and Idea, 346. Carritt: Theory of Beauty, Chap. III.
4. Notably Croce in his "Aesthetic."

its beginning in romantic aesthetics. The individualism and anthropomorphism of the time made the theory almost an inevitable one. The monistic conception of the universe, however, resulted in an expression theory where the expression of the self meant also the expression of the common essence of all things.¹

A purely moralistic purpose also had little support in this period. Schiller went farthest in this direction in his notion of the carrying over of the freely-chosen-form into the moral sphere, and in arguing for the aesthetic education of society by the ennobling of individuals through art. But Schiller himself strenuously objected to a mere moral bearing for his theory. He says, "A man in the aesthetic condition is neither physically nor morally constrained;—the beauty he produces affords no single result for the intellect or will, it carries out no design, discovers no truth, helps perform no duty, is equally incapable of establishing character or affording enlightenment of any sort."²

The central purpose of art for all the founders of modern aesthetics was the ennobling and enlarging of human life,—primarily the individual life, but also mankind as a whole through the individual. Its end is uniformly held to be the mediating of the divine in or apprehended by artists, a process whereby humanity becomes an individual, that is, attains the level of the mediators themselves.³ By the human *Einfühlung* which art impels it effects an understanding of the universe and life as a whole whereby the producer and spectator alike feel at one with all.⁴ By art one learns the essence of things, solves the problems of nature and life generally, and so learns of himself and

1. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 384, and *Plastic Arts*, 112.

2. Schiller: *Letters on Aes. Educ.*, Nos. 21, 25, and 27.

3. Schlegel: *Ideen*, 15.

4. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 250

realizes his own full powers and possibilities.¹ In these things art's end, expressed in general terms, is just to find life good and increasingly so as the insight and understanding brought by art increases man's sense of oneness with all the universe. Or, if to find life good be impossible, then, and with the same characteristics otherwise, art may be thought to have as its purpose the discovery and revelation of a realm which is good and beautiful and to which man may make temporary escapes toward life as it should be and is beyond the conditions of practical existence.² Here, as in the former cases, art is still said to be of and for the whole of human life and to have its central purpose in this "whole life" function.

E. The Classifications of the Arts.

The basis for the classification of the arts in romantic aesthetics was the degree of harmony attained between Ideas and their sensuous mediums, or, from another standpoint, the degree of sensuous accessibility attained for the Idea content of art works. When the Ideas and their media are considered as having mutual but not necessarily parallel development, then this basis sometimes takes on a double significance, as we shall see in the representative classifications of the period.

Evidence of the older media basis of classification is still present in the formative or plastic, the speech, and the tone groups of the arts as pointed out by some of the aestheticians,³ but even these groups are ranked upon the new basis by these men. On the new basis architecture is usually ranked lowest among the several arts because of its vague, external manifestation of Ideas. Sculpture.

1. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 292. Hegel: *Intro. to Fine Arts*, 105.

2. Schopenhauer, *op. cit.*, 239 and 346.

3. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, 206. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 371 and 482.

painting, music, and poetry follow in order in the ascending scale. But there are significant variations as to the positions given certain arts. Music is put lowest in one instance¹ and highest in another.² In Schopenhauer's classification the arts from architecture to Christian painting are ranked on the specified basis and then poetry is put still higher on the ground that it uses allegory wherein the objectified Will, the Idea, is a concept put directly into a sensuous medium.³

The double significance of the basis of classification used by the romanticists is best evidenced by Hegel's differentiation of three types of art and of the several arts on the same ground. He says that due to the mutual but uneven development of Ideas and their media the two are found in various stages of adequacy to one another. He makes out three such stages manifested by art, both in its historical development and in its contemporary ranges at any one time. The first of these stages historically and lowest logically is Symbolic art, in which stage the Idea is still inadequate to the medium. The second is the Classic stage in which Idea and medium are entirely adequate one to the other and in which, according to the basis of rating, the highest possibilities of art are attained.

The third stage is that of romantic art wherein the equilibrium is again broken, but where the medium is now inadequate to the Idea. Here the Ideas for use in art have outrun the mediums in development and so become Ideas for which no fit sensuous forms are known. Art here attempts to embody non-sensuous Ideas in mediums into which they do not fit and so projections and overflowings of the Ideas occur. So far as this type manifests a defective art, however, according to Hegel, the defect comes

1. Schelling, as above.

2. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 276 and 344.

3. *Ibid.* 310.

from the very nature of art itself in its sensuous media limitations. According to this account man's thought and spirit in the apprehension of Ideas increasingly outdistances the development of fit embodiments for them in his conception, so romantic art is already the beginning of the end for art as a human activity.¹

Because of special treatments in several of the aesthetic systems before us, and also because of their special interest in Browning's aesthetics, both music and drama require brief separate attention. The ranking of music as the lowest of the several arts by Schelling was undoubtedly due to the likeness, frequently pointed out by other men too, between it and architecture in the inaccessibility of the Ideas. But this notion as to the inaccessibility of the Ideas in music leads elsewhere to altogether different conclusions. Schopenhauer rates music above all the other arts, outside his own scheme of classification entirely, and as representative of the Will directly without any intervening Idea. He also characterizes it as perceived in and through time alone and thus contrasted to architecture which is perceived in and through space alone.² The relation of music to architecture and its identification with the Will are helpful theories, at least, toward an understanding of music and will be found significant features of Browning's ideas concerning this art.

The highest art for romantic aesthetics, in general, is the drama. Its materials are usually held to lie either in character or in society and its antitheses to be necessity and freedom in some form or other. In Schelling's account of the drama necessity is represented as objective and from without, in the form of evil or misfortune forced

1. Hegel: *Intro. to Fine Arts* 139-9. Cf. also Croce: *Aesthetic*, 307. Schelling's distinction between Antique and Modern Art is made on the same basis as the distinctions above specified and is another case of the double significance of the basis of art classifications under discussion.
2. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 276 and 344.

upon the noble and innocent, and freedom as subjective, in the form of a triumph over the evil and misfortune from within. By freely bowing to the penalty the innocently-guilty hero rises triumphant over fate through the human Will. Such is considered the original and absolute form of the antithesis and its status in tragedy, the highest art. In comedy the situation is reversed, but, since a subjective necessity cannot be called fate or destiny, a pretended destiny is here substituted for a real one. Goethe's "Faust" is cited as the great modern comedy and its way to freedom is pointed out to be objective and twofold,—by magic and by plunging into intense active life.¹

Hegel describes a tragedy as a representation of the conflicts between the interests and institutions of organized society. Persons are usually made to stand for the causes or purposes, he says, but the conflict is really between persons only so far as these have made the causes and interests of society their own. Here both sides are partly right and partly wrong and the freedom comes by the elimination of the partisan individual whereby the undivided good may survive for a continually improved status of society.²

Hegel and Schelling are in close agreement as to the special characteristics of modern drama. Its mixing of comedy and tragedy is particularly stressed. Its necessity side of the antithesis is found to take more and more the nature of an inner Nemesis whereby necessity and freedom both appear within the single individual and divided personality is presented. The social causes and purposes, according to Hegel, here often become mere desires of the heart, personal aims and ambitions rather than social principles and ends.

1. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*, 693 ff.

2. Hegel's theories on the drama, as here presented, are taken from Parker's *Lectures*, 5/5/20.

The end of drama, as Schopenhauer describes it, is to show us, in a representation, the nature and existence of man. The highest dramatic achievement is tragedy, which represents the terrible side of life, "The unspakable pain,—the triumph of evil, the scornful mastery of chance, the irretrievable fall of the just and innocent."¹ The evil represented is not merely that of the characters of the play, but rather it is the evil of human nature as a whole,—the hero's sin is the original sin of being alive at all. The penalty in the defeat of the individual is not to vindicate the moral order, as the other aestheticians tell us, but to show human existence as an evil in itself and one to be surmounted only by turning from the "will to live." Comedy, on the contrary, is an incitement to the "will to live." It, also, must show suffering and adversity, but these as passing into joy, and it "Must hasten to drop the curtain at the moment of joy that we may not see what comes after." In this light comedy appears as a mere burlesque on life and the existence and action there represented as "Of a sort attained only by error and—something that had better not be." Such is Schopenhauer's pessimistic commentary upon the nature of the world and human existence and upon man's efforts in drama to rise above or to find himself at home in such a world.

6. The Appreciation and Effects of Art.

A. Their General Nature.

The universality of the appreciation of art has been recognized in all aesthetics. That the appreciation comes as a pleasure and satisfaction has also been acknowledged from the first. Whether the pleasure comes in the imme-

1. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 326. Also *Supplements to Book III* of this work, 212 and 218.

mediate perception or only by reference to the comparative judgment, however, has been a frequent question of dispute. Whether the effects of art are chiefly individual or chiefly social was a further point of disagreement. Around its support of the immediateness and individualistic sides of these two questions romantic aesthetics built up its theories of art appreciation.

In the general notions of the time the aesthetic pleasure was thought to be the same whether derived from nature or from art,—art being considered merely one way of facilitating that intuitive knowledge of things in which the pleasure consists. The faculties involved in appreciation were taken to be the same as those operative in the imaginative conception of art works, that is, all four of the common experience faculties. The appreciation, however, was uniformly held to be independent of purely practical, moral, or intellectual interests. Art was thus given a unique autonomy in that all such interests seem to be carried by it, yet no one of these, nor group of them, can appear the sole or even paramount interest; the pleasure must come for life as a whole.

B. *Einfühlung*; The Objectification Theory.

One of the most generally accepted romantic theories as to the method of art appreciation is Herder's *Einfühlung* theory. This is a necessary corollary of the anthropomorphic interpretation of the world. By the latter it is believed that all one knows of the universe is through an interpretation of the objects of sensation by analogy to one's own nature. "*Der Mensch*," says Herder, "*fühlt sich in Alles, fühlt Alles aus sich heraus, und drückt darauf sein Bild, sein Gepräge.*"

The appreciation of the beautiful object is then held to be after this same fashion and to arise through character-

istics objectified from ourselves into the object, giving it from ourselves the life and beauty we seem to apprehend "out there." It is thought, for example, that one puts one's own poise and gesture, even, into a work of sculpture that is found pleasurable. There is also a feeling of oneness with the object on the part of the appreciator and in this lies the *Einfühlung* or objectification principle.¹ The intuitive and personal nature of this feeling shows both the immediateness and individualistic phase of romantic aesthetics at this point.

C. Judgment and Taste.

The first attempt to solve the universal-individual antithesis in the appreciation of art came in the four paradoxical moments of the aesthetic judgment in Kant's aesthetics. In this theory Kant declares that the satisfaction from beauty is disinterested as to the object represented, universal without concepts, purposive without a formulatable purpose, and necessary for all, though there is no common rule to test by.² Beauty is held to please only in society, but the pleasure is said to come subjectively by the individual judgment, and with a mere feeling that all men ought to agree. In this feeling, then, a sort of common sense for art is postulated and the subjective, necessary judgment is represented as at once objective also.³

In conformity with his notions concerning the aesthetic judgment Kant defined taste as "The faculty for judging that which, without the mediation of a concept, makes our feeling in a given representation universally communicable." It is said to be a subjective faculty, as every man seems to have his own taste, yet the feeling that all men

1. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 169.

2. Kant: *Critique of Judgment*, 45 ff.

3. *Ibid.* 192.

ought to agree objectifies the individual taste into a common universal one.

Before Kant's time a group of early modern aestheticians in England held taste to be a faculty to apprehend goodness as well as beauty and apprehension to come immediately from the discovery of balance, order, and harmony relations. Taste appears frequently in later romantic aesthetics with this formal idea concerning its nature omitted, but the rest of the theory stood and the men of the period throughout thought taste to be a sort of special feeling or sense excited in the appreciation of beauty. In this period, then, it was quite uniformly regarded as a faculty of all men and of the same nature as genius except that its imaginative powers were thought less intensive and continuous and so incapable of fixing the Ideas grasped into voluntary works for sensuous communication to others. In this larger sense taste embraces both the *Kinfühlung* and the Aesthetic Judgment theories with all their variations in the period under discussion.

D. The Effects of Art on the Individual.

The effects of art according to the theories above described would be primarily for the individual and for society only through the individual. Both Herder and Schiller believed that the complexities of modern life tend to specialization whereby individuals become only part men, giving themselves to thinking, feeling, or acting, never to all of these at once in single lives; and they believed that art, by its inclusive requirement of all these activities in production and its imaging of them all in the art work for appreciation, brings back wholeness and fulness of life to artist and appreciator alike.

Schlegel's notion concerning the mediation of the higher life by artists declares that those who cannot apprehend

the divine in themselves and their universe must find a center in such artists, to mediate for them, and that by this mediation all men are raised to the level of the individual mediators.¹ This expression of the self for the self in art, however, really means the discovery of the oneness of the self with the essence of all else, and in this sense the annihilation of the self is as true in the appreciation of art as in its creation. With this enlarged application Schlegel's lines may be taken as the consensus for romantic aesthetics when he says, "In der Begeisterung des Vernichtens offenbart sich zuerst der Sinn göttlicher Schöpfung. Nur in der Mitte des Todes entzündet sich der Blitz des ewigen Lebens."² This is what Schopenhauer means when he says that in the aesthetic experience, though knowledge comes here only by individual intuition, the knower rises above individuality to a pure subject of knowledge,—he comprehends the inner nature of things as identical with his own, the Will recognizes itself, and there is no more individual except the one indivisible essence.³

E. The Effects of Art in Society.

We have seen that Burke linked the beautiful with the instinct of sociability and that Kant later declared that the beautiful pleases only in society. The theories as to the social effects of art were first presented in a genuine romantic form, however, by Herder, who claimed that the more men raise themselves, through feeling, to knowledge of the essence of things and the more the image of the soul is impressed upon the raw material brought her, as is done in art, this much more men become one.⁴ In Schlegel the social effect idea runs faintly but surely all through his

1. Schlegel: *Ideen*, 15.

2. *Ibid.*, 27.

3. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 233.

4. Herder: *Erkennen und Empfinden*, 255.

aesthetics and appears especially in his previously-mentioned theory concerning mediation by art. By the exercise of their mediating power artists are said to raise humanity to the status of the individual, that is, to the level of the geniuses where there is oneness of men in appreciation of the common divine essence. Art enlarges the particular mind to the infinite mind. The great age will come, says Schlegel, when everyone fully and freely expresses himself while entirely feeling and comprehending the worth of all others.¹

The fullest and clearest expression of the social effects of art is set forth in Schiller's "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man." Like Herder before him, Schiller found the complex world one of specializations which divided and narrowed individual life. Since changes in this situation must come without interrupting group activities it was Schiller's opinion that the changes could appear only by the ennobling of the individuals who compose society, and that the proper instruments to this end are the *fine arts*. By the education of art the individual's manners are corrected, his amusements refined, and his leisure improved so that the high methods here operative impress themselves as of such general worth as to be carried over and applied by man in all his social activities and reflections. Aesthetic culture thus frees one to be what one ought to be, ready and capable to apply the principle of the freely-chosen-form of art to whatever is to say or do or be.²

In all this there is evidence clearly and definitely conceived as to how the effects of art on the individual appear in society. By aesthetic culture there comes a wholeness of the individual on all sides, a restored freedom from spe-

1. Schlegel: *Ideen*, 15 and 27.

2. Schiller: *Letters on Aes. Educ.*, Nos. 2, 7, 14, 15, and 27.

cialization that gives one largeness for meeting whatever problems may arise and a harmony with one's surroundings which induces reflections upon their nature and relation to man. Beauty alone can give one a social character, beauty alone can bring harmony into society, since it first brings harmony in the individual. Its freely-chosen-form principle carries over into man's life in all its relations. And if experience has not altogether justified the truth of his theory, Schiller appeals to a higher tribunal than experience, to a possible higher level of aesthetic culture than any yet attained, for its vindication.. A freely chosen form of life analogous to that represented in art is a reality in select circles, at any rate, and with such an ideal for all human society neither aestheticians nor others can have any quarrel.

7. The Fundamental Principle of Romantic Aesthetics.

The central and unifying principle of all romantic aesthetics lay in the mediating and conciliating of antitheses by art through its embodiment of Ideas in sensuous media. The further notion of the mutual though not always parallel development of Ideas and the forms for their embodiment gives the principle a largeness and flexibility whereby it is capable, if consistently applied, as it has not yet been, of explaining all art for all times.

Into and around this central principle all the other theories of romantic aesthetics nicely fit. The artist is conceived as one living a peculiar life and specially gifted to apprehend the Idea essence of things and to set this forth in sensuous forms in such a way that the resultant representation seems to show the antitheses of the universe all reconciled and all things in harmony.

The various antitheses thus resolved are from life as

a whole and art, therefore, assists its appreciators as well as its creators to an understanding and interpretation of the world and of life in it. According to this principle art images the harmony of all that is free and infinite with all that is limited and finite. On this principle it evidences a reciprocity between all antagonisms of thought and so brings man a feeling of the essential harmony between the natural limitations within which human existence falls and the freedom and aspiration allowed the essence of that existence beyond all the limitations. Reflecting this harmony or seeing it reflected in art works brings that wholeness and fulness of human life which it is life's purpose to attain.¹ And he who finds this attainment forever impossible on earth, because life here is evil, he too still subscribes to the theory, for by it he finds art itself a world for temporary relief from earth's limitations, a world wherein life's wholeness and fulness is a reality.²

1. Hegel: *Intro. to Fine Arts*, 105.

2. Schopenhauer: *Will and Idea*, 346.

CHAPTER II.

BROWNING'S GENERAL PHILOSOPHY.

1. Occasion for its Study and its Chief Characteristics.

A philosophy of some sort is necessary for an aesthetics. Every system of aesthetics and most theories concerning art, whether part of a system or not, are dependent upon and reflect the general philosophy of their authors and tend, more or less, to employ its central principle. The reflection of such a philosophy is clearly evident in the modern aesthetics presented in the previous chapter. The employment of a common central principle is not there so clear in both the aesthetics and philosophy, but such an employment is none the less the fact in most instances. For these reasons a preliminary consideration of the general notions of the time as to God, Nature, and Man seemed necessary to an understanding of the modern aesthetics previously investigated and is even more imperative in Browning's case, since the central principle of all his philosophy otherwise, the growth or progress principle, is so much a fundamental one also in his theory on art.

It is now over half a century too late to deny that there is a philosophy in Browning's poetry. It is both too late and too early, at the present moment, to deny that the philosophy found there is inappropriate to the poetry. The timely denial now seems to be that the philosophy here in question is a conscious one. Now it is possible, to be sure, to find a considerable number of Browning's poems from which to argue that he is pure artist and nowise a philosopher, and a Chesterton with his dexterity in para-

dox can do this admirably.¹ It remains the fact, nevertheless, that by far the greater number of Browning's works do contain philosophical theories. At the moment of artistic conception the poet was very likely not aware of his theories as formulated concepts, but this is not to say that he is conscious of no theory in his poetry. I prefer to believe that Browning knew what he believed and intended that his convictions should appear in his art, though he well knew that they required artistic transformation to that end.

Browning's philosophy, I repeat, is to be found in by far the greater part of his work. It has been often pointed out that his chief ideas were fully conceived from the first,² that there came afterward only a widening in details and an extended application.³ In this respect, then, so far as he had a system of philosophy it was an open one.⁴ In reality he had no system, but only a scattered and poetical use of ideas concerning God, Man, and the external Universe. One can gather up these ideas, correlate them, and patch out some sort of system, as we propose to do, but it is to be remembered that the system is then one's own and a thing built up out of the scattered theories found throughout Browning's life work. The poet himself was not at all concerned with systems of any kind.

As to the affinities of his philosophy, it seems increasingly evident that Browning owed a great deal to the great German philosophers dealt with in our first chapter. He was not so ignorant of them as he is sometimes represented to have been.⁵ Whether his agreement with them in so many respects was due chiefly to direct influence or to in-

1. Chesterton: Robert Browning, 17 and 46.

2. Mrs. Orr: Browning's Place in Lit., *Contemp. Rev.*, 23:939.

3. Raymond: The "Incarnation" in the Poetry of Browning, *M.S.*, 187.

4. Gingerich: Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning, 232.

5. Orr: Life and Letters of Browning, 100. Kenyon (Ed.): Browning and Domett, 49.

dependent growth is really a question of biography and one whose settlement, even if possible, would assist but little in an exposition of the theories involved. That he is a thorough romanticist in his philosophy is the point of significance here for our ends.

In view of the statement just made one would at once rate Browning as an idealist.¹ His philosophy, however, manifests an objective and realistic idealism rather than a subjective, abstract, and a priori one. The poet's sense of the reality of the external world and of practical life was too keen to admit of his falling back upon pure feelings, on the one hand, or upon mere subjective rationalism, on the other. "His creed as thinker," says Fotheringham, "and his governing conception as poet are the same—real idealism. No man holds more deeply and no poet has given more forcible expression to a conviction of the higher issues of life—to the belief in the reality of a life and order more perfect and more beautiful than the actual world. But the way to it is through the realities of this world and not through dreams and fine sentiments."²

"Real Idealism" is surely as satisfactory a phrase as one could find to characterize Browning's philosophy, but there are phases of that philosophy which this description does not at all indicate. The poet's frequent mysticism and his constant individualism, such as are especially evident in "Paracelsus" and "Luria," are compatible with "real idealism," but not necessarily a part of it. Their presence in Browning accounts largely for his belief that knowledge of the world is not rationally universal, but a special possession of the few and by direct occult revelation.³ His realism, however, assures us that this not the whole truth

1. Cf. the works listed in the Bibliography under the head of "Browning's Philosophy."

2. Fotheringham: *Studies of the Mind and Art of Robert Browning*, 85.

3. Royce: *Fugitive Essays*, 395.

of the matter, that one cannot live by this sort of knowledge alone, and that the universal knowledge of experience is also essential to a true view of the universe.

Whatever one calls this philosophy of Browning, its chief problems were

"The secret of the world,
Of man, and man's true purpose, path and fate." 1

To have a true notion of the external universe and of God is essential, but the main concern is the nature of human life in the world under God. On this point Browning's philosophy declares that man's life is that of a probational being in the midst of much evil, ugliness, and discord, but still a being with free choice among these evils and their opposites whereby still to find life good, beautiful, and harmonious. To this end one's life becomes an aspiration and effort to attain true knowledge, to exercise fit power, and to further the exchange of love. By wise choices in his probation and constant effort toward his aspirations one grows into harmony with the inner nature of all things and so makes progress toward oneness with the central essence, which is God. This evolution toward divinity by an increase of the divine immanent in oneself is, in Browning's opinion, the true purpose of human life.

One will find the above-described views frequently enough in Browning's works and will find them expressed in such a manner and under such conditions as to accept them unqualifiedly as Browning's own beliefs. They indicate unmistakably a real idealism such as has been declared to be the chief characteristic of his philosophy. The particular theories which go to make up this philosophy and to whose explication the following pages are given will continually substantiate the general characterizations above made.

1. Paracelsus, 1-15.

2. Ideas as to God.

There is far more than mere "irreverent witticism" in Voltaire's often-quoted remark to the effect that if God did not exist it would be necessary to invent Him, for Supreme Being of some sort or other has had a place in every philosophical scheme of the world that has ever been conceived by man. The great variations in the nature ascribed to God in different schemes of the sort might be taken as evidence that some invention had been found necessary. The same thing may, on the other hand, be taken as an inescapable argument for his permanent, irreducible, and inaccessible divinity. There is something of both these attitudes in Browning's real idealism.

The usual representation of God throughout the poet's works is that of an essence pervading all things, an essence always partially but never wholly revealed in the creative energy of nature and the aspiration of man. Pauline's lover says, "I saw God everywhere—I felt his presence," and again, he asks, "What is that I hunger for but God?"¹ Paracelsus also declares of this Supreme Being that,—

"Thus he dwells in all
From life's minute beginnings, up at last
To man—"

and that he is that

"From whom all being emanates, all power
Proceeds; in whom is life forevermore,
Yet whom existence in its lowest form
Includes; where dwells enjoyment there is he,
With still a flying point of bliss remote,
A happiness in store afar, a sphere
Of distant glory in full view; . . . 2

He is the beauty and the good which man apprehends as knowledge, power, and love in all things from lowest to highest.² He is felt in man as aspiration and the efforts

1. Pauline, 5.

2. Paracelsus, V-46.

3. Essay on Shelley, 1014.

impelled thereby are his praise.¹ The human mind divested of all thought would represent his "Unexpressed Will."² He is immanent in all, leaving his impress upon the universe of his creation just as men do theirs in their anthropomorphic interpretations of the world:³ but he is also transcendent, since his nature is never anywhere fully apprehended.⁴

In the transcendent aspect Browning sometimes views God much as the romantic philosophers did, that is, as the all-complete, unchanging, infinite perfection. He frequently refers to God as the absolute Truth, Power, and Love, and he speaks for Sordello to say of God in this transcendent aspect,

"Of a power above you still
Which, utterly incomprehensible,
Is out of rivalry, which thus you can
Love, though unloving all conceived by man--
What need!" 5

But the conception of God as immanent is usually more to his liking and is more to the good of man as he sees it. After the lines just quoted he turns immediately to this other aspect to say,

"But of a Power its representative
Who, being for authority the same,
Communication different, should claim
A course, the first chose but this last revealed—
This human clear, as that Divine concealed—
What utter need!"

And he is still clearer on the point in Bishop Blougram's declaration that

"Naked belief in God the Omnipotent,
Omniscient, Omnipresent, sears too much
The sense of conscious creatures to be borne
It were the seeing Him, no flesh shall dare." 6

1. Paracelsus, I-15.

2. Sordello, V-115.

3. Gingerich: Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning, 230.

4. Cf. Sordello, V-125; Luria, V-315; Christmas Eve, XXII-326.

5. Sordello, V-125.

6. Bishop Blougram, 355.

This immanence of God Browning found especially symbolized for the benefit of man in the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. He believes that analogous to God's incarnation in Christ there is an incarnation of the divine essence in both man and nature, though an incarnation less manifest in the latter than in the former. It is this belief on Browning's part that leads him, for all his lack of orthodoxy otherwise, to find the Christian incarnation idea so essential to his philosophy of life, as he does, for example, when he has the Apostle John declare that

"The acknowledgment of God in Christ
Accepted by they reason, solves for thee
All questions in the earth and out of it,
And has so far advanced thee to be wise." 1

In the quotations given one will find something already as to Browning's notion of the purpose of God. The matter is quite directly put in one poem to the effect that it is

"God's task to make the heavenly period
Perfect the earthan." 2

and somewhat more comprehensively in another where it is said that

"'Tis one thing to know, and another to practice,
And thence I conclude that the real God-function
Is to furnish a motive and injunction
For practicing what we know already." 3

So far as Browning is clear on the point he seems to say, then, that whatever conception of God men have the function of Deity in their universal scheme is just to furnish them motives and injunctions for living in accordance with their own final good. This divine purpose the poet finds especially immanent in great men, in artists particularly, whose gifts are from God. This is proven by the fact that these gifts issue in works whereby

"God uses us to help each other——
Lending our minds out." 4

2. *Grammarians' Funeral*, 280.

1. *Grammarians' Funeral*, 280.

3. *Christmas Eve*, XVII-324.

4. *Fra Lippo Lippi*, 345.

The whole matter as to the place and function given God in Browning's world order will become clearer as we go on to his theories concerning nature and men. For the present purpose it should be sufficient to appreciate that God is represented as an essence that is immanent in both nature and man and also transcends both sufficiently to include all their potentialities and possibilities. In the consciousness of man this essence knows itself as immanent divinity and in order to be at one with the whole essence, God, of which it knows itself a part, it seeks to know its like that is immanent elsewhere and that also transcends all embodiments. In this way the Deity of man's conception is made to afford him a worthy source of his satisfactions within himself and a worthy goal of his aspirations in something higher. This is to hold a balance between pure immanence theories which lead to self-satisfaction and materialism, and pure transcendence theories which lead to asceticism. It is a clear case of Browning's attempt to construct a working philosophy for practical life that would provide also for the whole and ideal life of each and all. It is the poet's real-idealism illustrated in his conception of Deity.

It must be noted, finally, that Browning regards his conception of God as a regulative idea,¹ and as a matter not at all susceptible of proof, or as unprovable by ordinary means, at any rate, for

"What proveth God is otherwise at least—
All else projection from the mind of man!" 2

God and Soul alone are not projections from the mind of man and these alone are the sole and necessary facts. The relations between Soul and God and the unprovable nature of both are stated in "La Saisiaz" as follows:—

1. Dhruva: Kant and Browning, 40.

2. A Death in the Desert, 390.

"The thing itself which questions, answers,—is, it knows;
 As it also knows the thing perceived outside itself,—a force
 Actual ere its own beginning, operative through its course,
 Unaffected by its end,—that this thing likewise needs must be;
 Call this—God, then call that—Soul, and both—the only facts for me,
 Prove them facts? that they o'er pass my power of proving, proves
 them such:

Fact it is I know I know not something which is fact as much." 1

Because of this attitude as to the proof for God's existence and because of his ascribing both immanence and transcendence to Deity the critics have had a sorry time in trying to classify the poet as monist, deist, pantheist, or any other nicely discriminated "ist." For our purposes his views are the essential thing and how these classify him is of no concern. So far as we need to characterize his attitude we need say only, as we have already done, that he is a real-idealist in his conception of God, just as he is everywhere else in his philosophy.

3. Ideas as to Nature.

The romantic philosophers generally used the term *Nature* in a very inclusive sense. Schelling may be taken as fairly representative of their views in the matter when he describes nature as a force in infinite self-activity, realizing itself in the finite yet unexhausted in that realization. Its various forms, he believes, are only apparent products or results since, in reality, nature is an eternal process that is ever fulfilling itself and never altogether fulfilled.² This is to make nature one life potential through all forms from the lowest to the highest. So considered nature includes man rather than stands over against him, and is explained in terms of man as her highest development.

With the anthropomorphism of the above view Browning would quite agree. He has little to say of nature as a

1. La Saiziaz, 852-3.

2. Schelling: *Phil. der Kunst*. S. W., V-384. Cf. also John Watson: *Schelling's Transcendental Idealism*, 97.

world of inanimate forms without relation to man. He would say with Coleridge that from nature

"We receive but what we give
And in our life alone does nature live."

But he would say, further, that the energy in things below man's level meets with nothing its like in him, and this because

"'Tis pure fire, and they mere matter are:
It has them, not they it: — " 1

And just here is the point of Browning's disagreement with the romantic philosophers. They include man in nature, or at least identify the creative energy in nature with that in man, while Browning sets man apart. He believes that nature has no appreciable uniformity and wholeness until the mind of man gives it these, and he so believes because he finds that nature lacks that "third thing," consciousness, which appears first in man and

"Which, intro-active, made to supervise
And feel the force it has, may view itself." 2

There are, then, two aspects of nature that are to be noted in Browning's philosophy,—that in which nature shows God's immanence in the form of unconscious creative energy, and that in which nature bears the impress of man and thereby seems to prefigure his conscious being.³ Of the first of these the poet had little to say except that it was a necessary preliminary to the other: the second is scarcely ever altogether missing from any of his works.

It is quite clear from what has been said that Browning is not a nature worshipper of the Wordsworth type. He looks chiefly to man for beneficent influences and where nature intervenes in the service he still looks to man through nature. To be sure, Pauline's lover finds spring

1. and 2. Cleon, 360.

3. Compare Paracelsus, V-46, to Cleon, 359, and Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau. 691.

regenerative, in keeping with the lover's new resolves;¹ Michal finds a plant prophetic of Paracelsus's success; and something "out there" seemed to whisper the Doctor his aspirations:² but even so, the human resolves and aspirations always came first and it was only a reflection of these that was seen in nature. What man finds like himself in the forms of nature is really only an objectification into them of his own high momentary moods. All the sympathy and accord with his impulses and aspirations and acts that man seems to find "out there" are, in reality, only an *Einfühlung* of himself into the external world.³

Nor does the fact that the sympathy and accord of nature with man is only apparent at all vitiate the beneficent influence. That the objectifications involved are from man makes them all the more potent for man, since it is just on this ground that he is able to find in them analogies that justify and incite his own high enterprise. Consequently, men long since

"Saw in the stars mere garnishry of heaven,
And in the earth a stage for altars only." 4

and we, today,

"If we have souls, know how to see and use,
One place performs, like any other place,
The proper service every place on earth
Was framed to furnish man with: serves alike
To give him note that, through the place he sees,
A place is signified he never saw,
But, if he lack not soul, may learn to know." 5

And all this because whatever we so objectify into things is really the divine essence from ourselves, which then meets the creative energy of external nature and recog-

1. Pauline, II.

2. Paracelsus, I-13 and 16.

3. By the Fireside, 187.

4. Paracelsus, 111-27.

5. Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, I-737.

nizes it as merely a somewhat different manifestation than its own of the God who

" . . . dwells in all,
From life's minute beginnings up at last
To man." 1

Analyse as I will and explain however I can, says Browning, still at every turn of nature

"That one Face, far from vanish, rather grows,
Or decomposes but to recompose,
Becomes my universe that feels and knows!" 2

It should be carefully noted that the immanence of God in nature, as Browning describes it, is not the pure immanence of the old Greek conception. For the Greeks the Gods dwell on the Sacred Mount; they live in rocks, trees, flowers, and brooks; they speak out to and intermingle with men. Such is the pure immanence, and this Browning never has. The Christian God idea transcends also and can, therefore, never be imaged except in such a symbol as the Incarnation which represents the immanent aspect of God, not the transcendent one. The Christian world, therefore, has no mythology, no imaged Gods, in its scheme of things. Transcendence has colored all and the God in nature is silent now, not open to the senses, accessible only to the spirit. To discover such a God in nature is to transcend the body and its senses, a thing never altogether or for any length of time possible. Yet because man is conscious of the divine within himself and of himself in nature he concludes that the Deity dwells in nature also, and he forever attempts to find Him there. Thus nature itself becomes at once a continual satisfaction and a continual aspiration, as it forever partially reveals and partially conceals God.³

The purpose of nature according to Browning's usual

1. Paracelsus, V-46.

2. Epi. to Dr. Pers., 414.

3. Gerard de Lairese, 970 ff.

interpretation, as is clear from the foregoing quotations, is to reveal the inner nature of things, that is, the divine essence immanent in them. It is made clear, also, that because of the limitations of external forms this revelation is always only partial. This last fact makes possible the conception that external nature has for its purpose the concealing, rather than the revealing, of the God who dwells there. So Bishop Blougram tells Gigadibs, with reference to an Omnipotent God, that

"Some think, creation's made to show him forth:
I say it's meant to hide him all it can,
And that's what all the blessed evil's for.
Its use in Time is to environ us,
Our breath, our drop of dew, with shield enough
Against that sight till we can bear its stress."¹

All this, however, has reference to absolute essence and to purely formal nature, and not to God as the immanent essence within nature's forms, and it is a part of the Bishop's sophistry, of course, not to make the reservations which Browning elsewhere makes for himself.

Since, then, it is nature's chief purpose to manifest the inner divine essence and to assist man in his effort to grow in knowledge of this essence, man therefore uses nature in art with the intention of furthering his help from nature in this direction. Using nature to this end calls attention, for instance, to much that would otherwise be missed, for

" . . . We're made so that we love
First when we see them painted, things we have passed
Perhaps a hundred times nor cared to see:"²

But whether used in art or studied directly, nature is a world full of meanings for man, a world only less significant in this respect than man's own; for it is a world from which man may learn of an immanent God essence like to his own "out there" and, also, of an essence transcending

1. Bishop Blougram, 355.

2. Fra Lippo Lippi, 345.

nature, indicating its potentialities, and so offering man fit aspirations in his worlds of thought and action.

4. Ideas as to Man.

A. The Nature of Man as Related to the External World and to God.

In his notions as to God and the external world, as above described, Browning shows it his persistent belief that an understanding of the nature of man and of human existence is the main concern for any and all of the activities of life. In his philosophy he begins with man as the highest known manifestation of creative essence and he anthropomorphically explains all else from that level.¹ In this light man appears as an ascending phase of the manifestation of creative energy, moving between lower life forms to the divine life of the spirit. It is man's upward movement within this human sphere that always secures the poet's attention. He professes consistently that his "Stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul" and that "Little else is worth study."²

The passage in Book V of "Paracelsus" previously quoted from is so clear, complete, and representative of Browning's views as to man's place in the scheme of the universe as to serve almost for both text and commentary on the matter. In this passage Paracelsus first traces an ever-present and increasingly-manifested life and change from the inanimate forms up through the animal world and declares that in the energy thus exhibited "God renews his ancient rapture."³ He then goes on to describe the evo-

1. Francis Furini, IX-967 and X-968.

2. Sordello, 74. Dedication to the 1863 reprint.

3. Paracelsus, V-46.

lution of man out of the divine energy of these lower forms, as I quote:

" Thus he dwells in all,
From life's minute beginnings, up at last
To man—the consummation of this scheme
Of being, the completion of this sphere
Of life: whose attributes had here and there
Been scattered o'er the visible world before,

Suggesting some one creature yet to make,
Some point where all these scattered rays should meet
'Convergent in the faculties of man.'"¹

Having accounted for man's appearance in the world, the passage next indicates the place which man takes in the external world from which he has evolved,—

" One stage of being complete,
One scheme wound up: from the grand result
A supplementary reflux of light
Illustrates all the inferior grades, explains
Each back step in the circle

. man once descried, imprints forever
His prescence on all lifeless things:

And this to fill us with regard for man,
With apprehension of his passing worth,
Desire to work his proper nature out,
And ascertain his rank and final place.
For these things tend still upward, progress is
The law of life, man is not Man as yet.
When all mankind alike is perfected,
Equal in full-blown powers—then, not till then,
I say, begins man's general infancy."

But the account of man's evolution does not end here. If, on the one hand, Paracelsus saw man evolved from and impressing himself upon all nature below him, now, and in the opposite direction, he sees man evolving toward and himself bearing the impress of a higher being. So, as he words it,

" All tended to mankind.
And, man produced, all has its end thus far:

1. Ibid. V-47.

But in completed man begins anew
 A tendency to God. Prognostics told
 Man's near approach; so in man's self arise
 August anticipations, symbols, types
 Of a dim splendor ever on before
 In that eternal circle life pursues."

The progressive nature of man indicated in the above quotations is, in Browning's opinion, a distinct characteristic of man alone. This view is most clearly set forth where he has St. John represent man as

"Lower than God, who knows all and can all,
 Higher than beasts which know and can so far
 As each beast's limit, perfect to an end,
 Nor conscious that they know, nor craving more;
 While man knows partly but conceives beside,
 Creeps ever on from fancies to the fact,
 And in this striving, this converting air
 Into a solid he can grasp and use,
 Finds progress man's distinctive mark alone,
 Not God's, and not he beasts': God is, they are,
 Man partly is and wholly hopes to be."

Although not so stated, a theory is implicit in the passage just quoted to the effect that the evolutionary quality always wholly accompanies and is the distinctive characteristic of the highest embodied form of creative energy. The lines given declare that man is this highest form in the present stage of the world development. This is to represent both the external world and God as static, while it represents man alone as dynamic and capable of progress. Upon man alone, then, rests the burden of working out further evolution toward oneness with the absolute or God.

It is not altogether clear in Browning whether this further evolution of man beyond man is still to take some definite embodied form or not, but the usual trend of his lines indicates that the next step is a transcendence o'

embodiment.¹ Man then appears to be the last as well as the highest stage of the embodied manifestations of creative energy and his life, so considered, consists in efforts toward the transcendence of his own and other embodiments and the achieving of oneness with the absolute, divine essence. As man, however, he can never altogether escape the flesh wherein he is embodied and whereby he is forever of nature and relative. Nevertheless, as akin to the divine also, to work constantly toward such an escape is, as Browning sees it, the nature of human life, and this whether one's activities lie in the field of practical affairs or in the lofty ranges of ethical conduct, in experimental science or high thinking, in art work or in worship.

Human progress, by the theory just defined, consists of the attainments of individuals, by the use of methods necessitated under the limitations of earthly embodiments, in the direction of insight into, sympathy for, and identification with the single essence in all things, which is God. The chief elements or materials of life for such a progress are knowledge or truth, power, and love; and the necessitated methods referred to are probation, aspiration, and progress, the last of which also includes the other two. It is to be understood that the classifications here made under the *Materials* and *Methods of Life* are merely devices of the present study and for the purpose of systematic discussion. They are classifications, none the less, made in accordance with the nature of things described by Browning and should assist toward their understanding.

B. The Materials of Life.

As materials of life I classify those things which Browning describes as the different modes of apprehending the

1. Browning's Cycle Theory to be discussed at the close of the present chapter, should be studied in this connection.

divine essence and as the various manifested forms which divine essence takes in particular individuals or things. Knowledge or truth, power, and love are the things of his philosophy which come under this classification. These all have the divine essence as a common factor and the modes of apprehension or the forms of manifestation as the grounds of variation. The variations within each and of each from the others are due, as Browning represents the matter, to the limitations imposed by the embodiments in which the divine essence of human apprehension occurs. These embodiments tend to obscure and conceal this common essence and, so far as they always partially succeed, the materials are always only relative and partial; that is, the absolute truth, power, and love of anything is never apprehended by man. So far as the concealment always partially fails, however, the materials always approach the absolute, and some of them more nearly do so than others because of less limitation from the embodiments in their case. The truth of these generalities will become apparent, it is hoped, as the several materials are now taken up separately for discussion.

Knowledge and truth are really one and the same material of life in Browning's use of the terms, but they signify the subjective and the objective phases, respectively, of the thing known. Two kinds of each are distinguished by the poet,—empirical and intuitive knowledge, and relative and absolute truth.

By knowledge is meant that store of ideas one has about the things of his universe. As represented by Browning it always comes first through the senses and can never altogether dispense with this channel.¹ This sensuous knowledge is empirical, by observation and reflection,² and gives

1. Francis Furini, X-968.

2. Paracelsus, V-46.

data as to the time, place, and causal relations. But there are also in one's store many ideas as to the inner nature of things, and these come by supra-sensuous means, directly, in flashes, and make up what is known as intuitive knowledge. Upon our store of these intuitive ideas depends all we know of the divine essence immanent in nature and man, and all we surmise beyond this. By increase in this sort of ideas we make progress toward transcending embodiments, since such ideas deal only with the inner essence of things.

It is to this intuitive sort of knowledge that Browning usually refers when he speaks of truth. The immediateness of its apprehension and the likeness of its data to that which apprehends them lead the poet to give it a subjective projection from the knower.¹ But it is not purely subjective, as in Kant's opinion, for it meets its like "out there" also, and is thus at once subjective and objective, identical in the knower and the thing known.² It is not susceptible of proof as is empirical knowledge, for its ideas are for the whole man and not for the intellect alone. Its ideas bring data of the inner life. They are the "sole facts" which attest the existence of God and the soul.³ As such they become regulative ideas for one's whole activity and reflection,—an essential addenda to the experiential knowledge of anyone who questions the nature of the world and life.⁴ Because of these very characteristics the ideas of truth are necessarily always relative. They never give the whole truth as to the inner life of things, for that would be at once to transcend the embodiment limitations, both of the thing known and of the knower, and so put an end to the regulative function of truth whereby it must always

1. Paracelsus, 1-18.

2. *Fifine*, CXXIV-733.

3. *La Saisiaz*, 853.

4. *Dhruva: Kant and Browning*, 40. *Royce: Fugitive Essays*, 386.

strive for and fall short of just such a transcendence. Full attainment would end truth's regime as a material of life for it would leave life no further purpose.¹

The descriptions of power found in Browning's works so regularly speak of it as a quality of the external world² or else as a phase of the absolute, and so seldom discuss it except in direct connection with knowledge, truth, or love. that it is rather difficult to determine just what he means by it as a material of life. He would undoubtedly have as its seat the first of the three souls of man which is described as

"A soul of each and all the bodily parts,
Seated therein, which works, and is what Does." ³

He finds it apprehended empirically in the external world as mechanical force, but intuitively in the world generally as divine activity. Power and love are the contrasts of his external world just as knowledge and love are the regular antitheses of his concrete human world. Like truth and love, power is always necessarily relative,⁴ and its increase in man is a constant progress toward the self-realizing power of Deity which man apprehends as immanent in the world.

The highest of the materials of life in Browning's philosophy, the one most nearly attaining to the absolute, is love. This appears in his works as a reduction of the essence of all things to emotional activity. It is represented as the ideas of truth emotionalized and in action. With these characteristics it appears as a dynamic material that is universal as an interactive force instead of a mere formulated concept or imaged idea, and so manifests its universality without at all disturbing individuality. It

1. Letters of Browning, ed. by Wise. Vol. II-90.

2. Paracelsus, I-46.

3. A Death in the Desert, 386.

4. An Epistle of Karshish, 340. Reveries, 1005.

therefore fits well with the individualism of Browning's philosophy and, at the same time, provides him with a means for the solidarity of society such as every philosophy finds it necessary one way or another to discover.

Further, love is a material exchanged very largely by intuition, consequently it gives manifestation to the inner freedom of things as well as to the principles of their external relations,—“All's love, yet all's law.”¹ It is less limited by embodiments than knowledge or power because of its dynamic emotional interactivity, so time, place, and causal relations are lost sight of in its moment and the absolute seems very close, with

‘ ‘ No depths to explore,
No heights in a life to ascend! no disheartening Before,
No affrighting Hereafter,—love now will be love ever more.”²

Yet, though love seems the absolute, which is the “prize” of life's endeavor, still “The prize is in the process,”³ so love grows and is really relative, too, though less so than knowledge and power. Even those supreme loves of artists whereby they first transcend the shapes and forms of things and then give a body beautiful to the spiritual objects of their affection, even these loves are only partial and a dying Aprile must still pray God to create for him “Eternal, infinite love”⁴ If thought and feeling and all one's potential powers merge in the moment of love, time and place seem lost, and the soul and sense are in unison,—it is only for the moment; for higher aspirations soon succeed, and higher loves. Otherwise man has either reached the stagnancy of death or become God.

The chief criticism of Browning's philosophy has been that he degrades knowledge and vastly overrates the feel-

1. Saul, XVII-183.

2. Ferishtah's Fancies, LX-939.

3. *ibid.*, XI-940.

4. Paracelsus, II-23.

ings as materials of life. The philosophers, especially, protest against his exaltation of the emotions and say that these should properly be rated with the sensations as the raw materials out of which thought may build its ideas and image its truths.¹ But all the criticisms of this sort tend to overlook the high place the poet continually assigns to intuitive knowledge and fail to note, on the other hand, that he insists continually upon the relativity of all the materials of life, love included with the others.

The relativity of all things on earth is a constant declaration of Browning's philosophy and that he finds love attaining nearer to the absolute than knowledge or power does not justify misrepresentation so as to have him appear as one who makes the emotions absolute, nor should it blind even the rationalistic philosophers to the truth upon which he makes his rating, namely, that life's highest aspirations are but emotional activities charged at once with truth and power. A love so constituted is all the materials of life in one and has, above all else, the ability to render understandings and satisfactions such as transcend momentary limitations and hallow their times as though with a divine presence. Yet such consummations are rare and only momentary on earth, and at their best they never report the full and complete love which one's own potentialities declare to be still ever unattained.

The just criticism of Browning at this point is that he overstresses the relativity of the materials of life. He says that "The prize is in the process," and this is to leave knowledge, power, and love in constant flux without stopping places ever or anywhere from which to contemplate and judge whether the process is a worth-while "prize," or whether the direction of its progress is one worthy of con-

1. Triggs: Browning and Whitman. Jones: Browning as a Phil. and Rel. Teacher. Santayana: *Inter. of Poetry and Rel.*

tinuance. Yet there are those who profess to find that his works "Refresh the sources of thought,"¹ that they have effected "New combinations of thought and feeling,"² and that they have assisted in healing the antagonisms in life between the finite and the infinite.³ Whatever truth there is to findings of this sort is evidence that there are readers who discover standing place and vantage point in Browning's philosophy whence, in "A Moment's Halt," they may make their judgments of life.

C. The Methods of Life.

As the things whereby man lives were above classified as the materials of life in Browning's philosophy, so the different phases and aspects of man's conduct and state of being with reference to these materials may well be classified as the methods of life that are distinguished in his philosophical theory. In their logical order these methods are probation, aspiration, and progress. In these three lie the poet's fundamental philosophical principles and in the last of them, the principle of progress, lies the central and unifying principle of all his philosophy of life, including his aesthetics.

The probation theory of life starts from the belief that the world and life in it are evil since their materials, due to their empiricism and relativity, are always limited and partial. As limitation or partiality the evil may be thought of as the negative phase of the materials of life, a phase that is always inherent in them as earthly manifestations of the positive divine essence. Browning has a whole group of these negatives,—such as ugliness, doubt, discord, etc.,—which may be brought into the moral category as evils.

1. Leo Quesnil, quoted by Wise: *Lit. Anec. of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. I-601.

2. Dowden: *Robert Browning*, 178.

3. Raymond: *The Incarnation in the Poetry of Browning*, 186.

Human life, then, finds itself also endowed with free will whereby to surmount these evils through an increasing discovery of the positive essence which they tend to conceal. Human life is ever on test, in fact, so to choose among the materials of life and between their empirical and intuitive phases as to make out a harmonious existence, one that is always practical though increasingly spiritual, while it works past the negatives toward the positive essence in all things. In this sense human life is always a probation. But the limitations and partialities are never altogether surmounted and the positive essence never wholly discovered on earth, consequently a future state in which these consummations are realized becomes the final end of human life and a necessary part of the probational plan.¹

To carry on successfully the probational life above described requires that some higher good, further discoveries of the divine in things, be kept constantly in view and constantly striven for,—and this phase of human life is aspiration.² As Browning describes it, aspiration is felt as a yearning to discover the inner nature of things, the divine immanent there, and because the divine is transcendent also a full discovery is impossible and aspiration is continual. The immanence of the divine in man himself makes his aspirations felt as from God as well as to him, but its transcendence makes it impossible ever to know the things aspired to as factual concepts of the mind. They are, in reality, intuitions that are set up as regulative ideas of man's conduct in life rather than constitutive principles of his reason. Such, for example, are the immortality of the soul, the unity of the cosmos, and the existence of God, which have become the perennial objects of man's endeavor

1. Cf. esp. *Sordello*, III-94, and IV-111.
2. Cf. *Paracelsus*, I-15, and *Sordello*, I-79.

to know from the very fact that they are aspirations and not acquisitions of the human mind.¹

Because of the characteristics of aspiration above specified man's yearning to discover the inner nature of things is always felt by him as a potential experience or quality which he has the spiritual capacity to realize whether the actual realization is effected or not. Whether this state of potentiality issues in act and product or not, even in itself it signifies struggle and effort, for it is never free, unconscious, and harmonious development.² True aspiration is a thing of the individual's own inner consciousness. Felt there as a potentiality, it is what Browning often refers to as the Will,³ and in this light the Will of his conception is never an inhibiting or restraining force, but an ever-active and aggressive one such as makes the choices of probation and is itself the aspiration of man to realize the Will of God of which itself, as human, is a part. Such an aspiration Browning finds operative in all man's activity and reflection. It is operative in art production especially, and in evidence there even in the works of art themselves,—⁴ which only substantiates what I insist upon throughout, that Browning's philosophy of life is at once also his philosophy of art.

Finally, the life of probation which employs the constant struggle and effort of aspiration must necessarily manifest a progress, and this progress is, in Browning's representation, both the means and the end of that life.⁵ Progress signifies that life is both a being and a becoming, a probation and an aspiration, hence it includes all the phases and aspects of existence resolved to a single principle. Prog-

1. Cf. Dhruva: Kant and Browning, 26.

2. Miss West: Browning as a Teacher. *Liv. Age*, CXI-710.

3. Sordello, V-115. Alexander: *Analysis of Sordello*, B.S.P., III-16.

4. Sordello, VI-120.

5. Frances Furini, IX-967 and X-968. *Letters of Browning*, ed. by Wise. Vol. I-82.

ress, therefore, is the central principle of all life, whether practical, experimental, speculative, or creative.

There was hint of the progress theory of life in Hegel's notion that Ideas and mediums for their embodiment have a mutual development, but so far as Hegel or any of the romanticists used the growth principle it was used only as a subordinate one. Browning, on the contrary, makes this growth principle the central one of all his philosophy and uses it, as the romanticists do their central principle, too, for the healing of all the antitheses of human existence and activity, those in the artist's life and works included.¹ And progress is a most serviceable principle to this end, for what at once *is* and *becomes* cannot be pure matter nor pure spirit, nor any other absolute antagonists, since in organic growth all form and essence are reciprocally at one. More and more as one grows in his store of the materials of life these materials report a universe that is also evolving its contents the while it brings its potentialities to the growth of man. Progress is, therefore, a living principle or method actually at work in the world. In fact, the very relativity of the materials of life makes the progressive method of life an inescapable one, for each relative material come upon impels one to seek out its relations, and each of these, in turn, lures on to new and progressively increasing other relations, so leading man an interminable search for that whole which embraces the relative thing in all its relations, all relative things in one, and is, therefore, the absolute or divine one.

There are various insistent criticisms to which Browning's theories as to the methods of life are open. His optimism and realism leave him open to the charge of being an opportunist, and his description of aspiration makes the

1. *The Ring and the Book*, I-421.

opposite charge possible, namely, that he and those who agree with him deal only with beautiful, vain dreams that have no connection with practical life. The presence of both realism and idealism in his work is answer enough to the charge against either of these. Besides, the extremes in either direction are constant "verbotens" of his philosophy. The balance he attempts between them is well expressed in "Sordello" where he says,

"God has conceded two sights to a man..
 One, of man's whole work, time's completed plan,
 The other, the moment's work, man's first
 Step to the plan's completeness: what's dispersed
 Save hope of that supreme step which, descried
 Earliest, was meant still to remain untried
 Only to give you heart to take your own
 Step ?
 That last step you'd take first?—an evidence
 You were God: be man now!"

1

The most serious criticism to be made against the poet's philosophy is that his progress principle, like the high relativity of his materials of life, allows for no stopping places wherein satisfactions for what is attained may be had and in which contemplative judgments of the process and direction of the progress may be made. Yet Browning frequently acknowledges the weakness of the progress theory at this point,² and if he attempts no strengthening alternatives it must be that he finds the satisfactions of life in the progress itself and that he regards man's free choice of the progress principle as a sufficient judgment of its process and direction. And it is, too, in many ways, a quite satisfactory principle whereby at once to explain the universe and to live in accordance with the explanation. All the higher activities of man,—science, morality, philosophy, religion, and art,—can effectively use it for a

1. *Sordello*, IV-111.

2. Cf. esp. *Sordello*, III-99, and *Cleon*, 358.

common point of departure and a rendezvous for the common human ends they all must serve. Its universal serviceableness urges its use as a fundamental principle in any modern philosophy of life. It is because of this that every life, in Browning's philosophy,—whether practical, experimental, speculative, or creative, and however dismal its failure on earth,—is still a probational one that aspires and makes progress. To do so is the very nature of human life, as he sees it, so the final end and resting place of the progress of human life can and must be in some after life, a thing which necessarily remains always the "Grand Perhaps" of eschatology.¹

D. The Individual and the Race.

The philosophy of Browning, as we have seen it thus far, is preëminently and in all its phases a philosophy of and for human life. Further, as between the group and individual elements of humanity, it declares that the good of the individual is the supreme purpose of life, and that the good of the race is only subordinate and to be accomplished through the individual. All its pronouncements, and especially those as to the materials of life and its methods, are unmistakably those of an individualistic philosophy.

His fundamental arguments in support of individualism are: first, that consciousness itself, which appears in its pure form only in the individual, gives the self supremacy: and, second, that the existence of the soul and God are the two sole facts, in the sense that these are the only pure intuitions of the individual.² It is because of these "facts," as he calls them, that Browning finds the individual related directly to the absolute and of universal value in

1. Bishop Blougram, 351.

2. Bishop Blougram, 352. La Saisiaz, 852.

himself. Consequently, the individual's personality overtops any and all of his own works and stands out distinctly from the personality of others. Further, too, what self-sacrifice and altruism the individual indulges are really only in behalf of his own greater self-realization, for realising oneself through work for others is to bring the divine in them to recognition and that is to bring oneself nearer to the absolute, that is, nearer to the realization of the divine essence in all things.¹ Only in this fashion, in fact, can one avoid that extreme individualism which assigns absolutism to himself on earth and finds all outside himself an empty universe such as called forth the lonely egotisms of the "Sturm und Drang."² Pure egotism and pure altruism are both disintegrations of the personality that result in half men and in idle mourners of lost ideals.³

Yet for all he says as to the direct relations of the individual to the absolute, Browning by no means overlooks the fact that, empirically, the individual is related also to his fellows and has meaning in the world only as he contributes to their progress as a race. We have just seen, however, how he attempts to adjust his ideal individualism to his practical collectivism by declaring that all work in the service of mankind is really done for the further realization of the self. If "Collective man outstrips the individual,"⁴ then, he does so only in the empirical world and his activities remain always unrealized until some individual personality becomes the "Incarnation of the People's hope."⁵ This is possible, on the part of individuals, through the dynamic properties of love as a material of life, for through great unselfish love, as Pompilia puts it,

1. Ferishtah's Fancies, VIII-938.

2. Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, 788.

3. Sordello, II-89. Cleon, 359.

4. Sordello, V-111.

5. Ibid., V-105.

"God stooping shows sufficient of his light
For us i' the dark to rise by." 1

The above passages and others their like maintain that there is a social as well as individual side to life. Yet it is a frequent declaration of Browning's works that as men rise in culture they become more and more individuals in their own right and so have less need of social helps,² and that the service of great men to their fellows, that of artists especially,³ is just to bring the mass of humanity to this high level where they also are outstanding individuals and beyond the need of such service. This is indeed individualism in the service of humanity. It is an individualism that rises out of mere collectivism and tends toward a society of men wherein each is self-sufficing,⁴ because self-equipped with a workable store of the materials whereby men live and with the methods of life whereby to approach the full store of these materials which lies in the absolute and is to be attained only in the after life.

E. The Whole Purpose and Ultimate End of Life.

In retrospect, after examining and bringing together the scattered theories of Browning's philosophy, one somewhat changes first impressions and concludes that this philosophy is, after all, no blind optimism resting only on illusions, but rather that high courage of conviction that comes only to those who face the stern facts of existence and literally "see them through." It recognizes inherent evil and original sin as a part of the world order, but it holds these to be only those partialities and imperfections in the materials of life which it is the very business of human life to overcome; and it declares that by its conquests in this di-

1. *The Ring and the Book*, 525.

2. *Sordello*, II-87, V-111. *The Inn Album*, IV-789.

3. *Balaustion's Adventure*, 625.

4. *Paracelsus*, V-46.

rection alone human life succeeds and is found good. That the partialities and limitations of flesh and form are not altogether escapable accounts for the struggles and miseries of life, but that there is always partial escape and momentary triumph is the very vitality of the life process itself, for in this lie the satisfactions from what has been and the aspirations that lead on.

Human life, then, is a probation and a discipline of the spirit,—and this because, not in spite of, the limitations of the body. But such a probational life is possible to man only upon one condition,—that the partial and momentary escapes and triumphs promise sometime to become whole and permanent. Such whole and permanent escapes of the spirit are not possible while the life remains human, consequently a future life, the immortality of the soul, becomes an essential belief to the probational human life theory of Browning's philosophy.¹ "The prize is in the process," yes, but only upon condition that the process persists throughout life and has its definite and attainable goals in the hereafter.

The future life then becomes a concern of this life, in Browning's philosophy, to the extent that it is made the ultimate purpose of human existence. Obviously such an end must promise a higher state of existence than that of the earthly life, but further than this the nature of the after life needs no explication. His speculations in mystic and Oriental eschatology, however, sometimes lead Browning to extend the general features of the earthly life, as he conceives them, on into the future state. He does this upon the assumption that life is progressive "There as here!"² and that it passes through successive and continually higher cycles of existence. These cycles begin be-

1. *La Saisiaz*, 855.

2. *Epilogue to Aasolando*, 1007.

low and extend above the human phase,¹ which has its minor cycles also, but the cycles of chief concern to human life are those of the after life, since these are at once assured by and incentives to the cycle character of human effort and attainment. The best statement of the theory comes from the Collector in "Old Pictures in Florence" who sets it forth as

"A fancy some lean to and others hate—
That, when this life is ended, begins
New work for the soul in another state,
Where it strives and gets weary, loses and wins;
Where the strong and the weak, this world's congeries,
Repeat in large what they practiced in small,
Through life after life in unlimited series;
Only the scale's to be changed, that's all." 2

But immediately afterward Browning seems to stand with the old Collector and to repeat after him, "Yet I hardly know." The cycle life extended into the hereafter offers him a fine analogy for the progressive life here, but it has no offering of anything whole and permanent such as his philosophy elsewhere assures to the aspiring individual. One can only say of the poet that he is very sure of a hereafter in a higher status, but that otherwise the future condition of man is a "Grand Perhaps" the exact nature of which—"Who can say?"³ It is necessary but sufficient for his philosophy that human life has hope of a larger and fuller existence elsewhere, in aspiration toward which it may here and now work out its probation and make its progress.

1. Paracelsus, V-46.

2. Old Pictures in Florence, 177.

3. Easter Day, XXXIII-335.

CHAPTER III.

GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS RELATIVE TO BROWNING'S AESTHETICS.

1. Its Location and General Characteristics.

Browning's theories on art, for which we are now ready to make direct search, are quite uniformly distributed throughout the poet's works. There are places, to be sure, whole poems and long ones even, that are entirely without them; but there are other places where a collection of them appear in a single poem or passage. They are more easily apprehended at some places than at others because of less admixture of other doctrines, or because of less transformation from the imagery and emotions of their poetic setting. Again, here or there they are more clearly recognisable as Browning's own because he speaks them himself or because he has them spoken by such imaginary or historical personages and in such situations as regularly bring forth his own views. Some of these locations it may be well to have in mind from the start.

The works in which Browning himself speaks his theories may be divided into two groups, one of prose and the other of poetry. The first of these groups is composed of his letters; of his advertisements, prefaces, and dedications; and of his "Essay on Shelley." The second group is made up of all his non-dramatic poems and the non-dramatic passages in poems otherwise dramatic. Some of the poems and passages of this sort most significant for an aesthetic content are:—The Guardian Angel, Transcendentalism,

One Word More, Francis Furini, the digression in Book III of *Sordello*, and Books I and XII of *The Ring and the Book*. Most of the Prologues and Epilogues deserve also to be read in this connection, although they, like some of the works named, are very often philosophical or critical rather than aesthetical.

The works in which dramatic personages are made the mouthpieces for Browning's theories on art are far too numerous to list at this place. The best of them are to be found in those well-known groups of poems that deal, respectively, with poetry, painting, and music. "Old Pictures in Florence" has been said to contain "A full confession of Mr. Browning's creed with respect to art,"¹ but it is more accurate to say with Mr. Symons that "It perhaps contains the most complete and particular statement of Mr. Browning's artistic principles that we have anywhere in his works."² It does contain his central progress principle and several subordinate theories as to the nature of the artist, of his works, and of art appreciation; but there are many of his theories fully as important as any of these, except the one on the progress principle, that are here entirely missing. "Pippa Passes," "Easter Day," "Mr. Sludge, the Medium," "Fifine at the Fair," to name only a few, contain significant theories of his aesthetics that are not mentioned at all in "Old Pictures in Florence." The full number of such works and of the theories set forth in each can appear only as the theories themselves are presented.

All that has just been said goes to show somewhat the scattered location and the fragmentary nature of the aesthetic theories under study. But after one has located the theories and has differentiated between Browning's own

1. Dowden: *Studies in Literature*, 224.

2. Symons: *Introduction to Browning*, 100.

and those of his dramatic personages that are in disagreement with him, and has, further, extracted the theories found in his poems from the imagery and emotional elements with which they are there artistically clothed, even then one finds that still further differentiations need to be made before a synthesis can begin. Face to face with the theories one finds them often mixed also with ideas given to the establishment of the philosophy of life out of which they grew and to the justification of Browning's own practice in art. In other words, philosophical and critical ideas occur in and around them and one must constantly differentiate between aesthetics, philosophy, and criticism if his final report is not to be a hodge-podge of all three.

The mixture of aesthetics and criticism is most in evidence, perhaps, in the "Pacchiarotto" collection wherein the poet attempts a direct answer to his critics. "Transcendentalism" is partly the same sort of thing, and many another poem. The mixture of philosophy and aesthetics is well illustrated in the "Essay on Shelley," among the prose works, and in "Abt Vogler," among the poems. If one keeps in mind,—first, that philosophy is an attempt to explain the universe and all it contains while art attempts to give an interpretative representation of this universe and is, therefore, to be explained by the use of certain philosophical principles; and, second, that aesthetics is made up of the principles which attempt to explain art works in general while criticism is the application of these principles to particular art works;—if one remembers these things there should be no difficulty in differentiating between philosophy, aesthetics, and criticism. The three are interrelated, but there is also a clearly defined difference between them. The three occur largely in a mixed form in Browning's works and only so far as one can differenti-

ate principles held generally applicable in the explanation of art can one offer an aesthetics out of the poet's many theories.

A differentiation and synthesis of the sort above indicated is the task of the remaining chapters of the study in hand. The chief aim of such a study, whatever its hopes of new findings for aesthetics, must be to call the attention of students of Browning to an added store, a richness born with the artistry, that is theirs for the taking. This is no-wise done with an eye to setting up any theory as to what poets should offer in their works, nor as to what readers should find in order to enjoy poetry. There is nothing here to be established except that Browning does offer theories of his own as to the nature of the artist, his work, and his audience, and that there are in these theories various interests and values for the general reader as well as for the philosophical student who takes up Browning's works. And if God, nature, human life, genius, art, and love are the half dozen elementary themes of all poetry¹ then surely the things here to be pointed out have a right to be in poetry whatever else one insists upon finding there.

The scattered, fragmentary, and mixed characteristics of Browning's aesthetics already pointed out make it clear that he attempts no aesthetic system. Here, as in the case of general philosophy, one who presents an aesthetics as that of Browning must be understood to have collected, correlated, and synthesized the scattered theories on art according to a scheme of one's own that is suited to that end. However much determined by the content to be presented within it this scheme is still always the student's own, and to whatever extent a system of aesthetics appears thereby, this system must be one built by the stu-

1. Dowden: *Studies in Literature*, 191.

dent out of Browning's theories. Yet though Browning has no system we believe that he has a sufficient number of theories as to the various phases of art to make up an aesthetic whole and that there is warrant for our seeking that whole since he himself professes to do so in his art.¹

The aesthetics under investigation must be further characterized as a genuinely romantic one and, except for minor variations to be noted as they are come upon, quite like the aesthetics presented at the outset of the present study. The likeness of Browning's general philosophy and of his aesthetics to the ideas of the great German philosophers and aestheticians before him, and his statements in letters of 1842 to the effect that he reads German pretty well,² that he is reading Tieck's and Schlegel's translations to help him with his German,³ and that certain Quarterlies contain articles on Liebnitz,⁴ Spinoza, and Descartes,—these things somewhat contradict the assertions that "He has no bond of union with the German philosophers but the natural tendencies of his own mind," and that "He resembles Hegel, Fichte, or Schelling . . . by the purely creative impulse which has met their thoughts."⁵ They leave one a decided conviction that some familiarity with the aesthetics of the Germans must have been a part of that wide knowledge he acquired in his father's library and in those many British Museum days. If his readings in those Museum days could be known I daresay that much of the likeness of his ideas on art to those of the German romanticists would be explainable on the grounds of direct influence rather than on those of independent growth. Nor would this detract from the poet's merits, particularly, for

1. *Fifine at the Fair*, XLIV-712.

2. *Browning and Domett*, ed. by Kenyon, 49.

3. *ibid.*, 52.

4. *ibid.*, 57.

5. Mrs. Orr: *Handbook to Browning's Works*, 4.

the variations and advances of his ideas upon theirs and his special use of aesthetic theories are nowise a mean contribution in themselves.

Finally, it is to be said of Browning's aesthetics, especially in its likeness to romantic aesthetics, that it is decidedly an idealistic art theory. Here as in the case of his philosophy, however, his views differ from those of his predecessors in the direction of explaining art also on a practical basis. One must qualify idealism, then, as a description of his theory of art. He says that the artist must live a normal life even if he is "Earth's essential king,"¹ that the art works must portray life as it is as well as a transcendent life,² and that appreciation of art alone never makes up an existence.³ In his theory, as everywhere else in his philosophy, Browning is a real idealist,⁴ seeking at once a practical basis of operation and an ideal realm for the human exercise of that divine gift which has to do with art.

2. The Relation of Browning's Aesthetics to his Philosophy.

It has been several times repeated heretofore that Browning's aesthetics grew directly out of his philosophy. One may go even farther and say that there is almost exact correspondence between the two throughout, and that the poet's aesthetic principles and the theories in regard to them are really only his philosophical ones carried over and applied in a different field. How and in what sense this is true it is the attempt of the present section to make clear.

In the first place, Browning's ideas concerning the na-

1. *Sordello*, V-115.

2. *Fra Lippo Lippi*, 345.

3. *Fifine at the Fair*, XXXVI-710.

4. *Fotheringham: Studies in the Mind and Art of Robert Browning*, 85.

ture of God, the external world, and man appear as fundamental concepts also for his aesthetics. In his philosophy he says that the creative energy of nature and man is really the divine immanent there and that this divine essence is increasingly revealed to man as he strives to learn the inner nature of the natural and human worlds. In his aesthetics, then, his artists are all made seekers after this essence in the external world and in human life. Art works themselves, because they have the impress of man, show the Deity immanent in men. The appreciation of art, too, so far as it is dealt with, is represented as an effort of art appreciators to know the immanent essence and to increase their findings of it in themselves as well as in all things outside themselves.¹ "All the arts," says Browning, "are mediators, between the soul and the Infinite shifting always like a mist, between the breath on this side, and the Light on that side,—shifted and coloured! mediators, messengers, projected from the soul, to go and feel, for Her, out there!"² Art seen in this light is a mediation of the divine to men.

But art also mediates humanity and nature to men. It especially catches and reflects the life of man, that life which objectifies and stamps itself upon nature. As the speaker in "Easter Day" words it for Browning,—

" . . . Art supplants, gives mainly worth
To nature: 'tis man stamps the earth—
And I will seek his impress." 3

It is just on this ground, too, that Browning explains the creative role of the artist. In his philosophy he declares that man anthropomorphically objectifies himself into nature and so attributes life to otherwise inanimate objects:

1. Cf. esp. *Pictor Ignotus*, 341; *Abt Vogler*, 382; and the *Essay on Shelley*, 1011 and 1014.
2. *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, Vol. I-542.
3. *Easter Day*, XXV-333.

in his aesthetics he finds the artist doing likewise and even going farther to fashion his own forms into which to objectify his life. Thus the artist fashions and animates what was otherwise dead stuff, mediates the divine of man and nature to man, and "Repeats God's process in man's due degree."¹

Artists are able to mediate the immanent divine essence because they are able to apprehend it as intuitions in the form of knowledge or truth, power, and love; and, secondly, because these intuitions are then reproducible in representations of the things in which they were first apprehended. So Browning's artists are always seekers after these three materials of life and revealers of them, both in their lives and in their works, and his appreciators of art are also able to find the intuitions of the artists in the art works and to make them their own. Thus, what were the materials of life in Browning's philosophy have at once become the materials of art in his aesthetics. That he usually refers to the materials of art as *truths* in nowise excludes power and love, for in the truths of art, as he defines them, both power and love are constituent elements.

As the *materials of life* become the *materials of art*, so the *methods of life* likewise become the *methods of art* when the poet passes from philosophy to aesthetics. Probation, aspiration, and progress, then, become the phases and aspects of conduct by which art is produced, has its effects, and is appreciated. These three are described as the methods of life of artists and appreciators of art and as the nature of the life represented in the art works themselves. They have to do with the various phases and aspects of apprehending the materials of art in their embodiments and of producing these materials in art mediums, conse-

1. The Ring and the Book, I-421.

quently they include all the principles and theories used to explain the content-and-form problems of Browning's aesthetics. They are fundamental principles in his aesthetics, for they are all included in the last of the three and so make up the central and unifying principle of his whole theory of art, the principle of growth or progress. And here again, the fact that he usually refers to the methods of art as various manifestations of progress in putting art materials in forms must not be taken to mean that he here excludes probation and aspiration, for in the progress of art, as he explains it, probation and aspiration are also essential methodic devices for getting content into form. This matter is important for an understanding of all the poet's aesthetics, so it may be well to pause and take note separately how each of the three methods is carried over from his philosophy into his aesthetics.

In his philosophy Browning represents the probational life as one on test so to choose among the relative materials of life as to find life increasingly free of embodiment limitations and so increasingly good. The limitations were upon the immanent divine essence and appeared as negative phases of it which the poet called evils. In this light evils are inherent in the earthly embodied forms of the divine essence, they are just the limitations due to those forms, and they are always incentives, challenges, in themselves toward the escape and freedom of the essence from these form limitations. All this is carried over directly by Browning into his aesthetics and one finds his artists and appreciators also on probation to choose among the materials of life, which have now become the materials of art also, in such a fashion as to find their own lives and the lives represented in art works increasingly free from their embodiment limitations and so increasingly good. These

embodiment limitations are always just what give rise to the negative phases, whether in the materials of life or of art, and show themselves in art works as ugliness, discord, the grotesque, etc. For this very reason these "evils" of art are immediate and inescapable incentives toward the escape and freedom of art truths from the relativity imposed by their embodiments. This, then, is Browning's explanation of the use of evil in art, seen in connection with the probation method.

It has been noted that the partial and limited character of truths gives them their relative nature, and with respect to this phase of them Browning points out certain choices that are especially tempting to the probational life of artists but which mark inevitable failure in the probation. He finds artists particularly inclined either to rest with the high degree of the truths they have already attained or else to scorn the partial and to strive at once for the whole truths.¹ Again, they are likely to prefer one material of art, that is, one element of the truths, such as love or knowledge, over the others.² Any such choices repudiate the conditions of the probation itself and lead to failure; for artists, appreciators, and the lives represented in art works, even, are all on probation to choose, or seem to choose, so as to have life appear as increasingly free from all partialities and limitations due to its embodiments.

Aspiration also is carried over from the poet's philosophy into his aesthetics. In his philosophy it appeared as a constant yearning and striving for fuller knowledge, power, and love. The relativity of these materials of life were represented as furnishing both the satisfactions of partial success and the desires for fuller apprehensions. All this is then directly applied also to the production and

1. *Sordello*, I-79, III-99, V-111, VI-124. *Cleon*, 358.

2. *Aprile*, for example, as in *Paracelsus*, II-22 ff.

appreciation of art, and is even made a manifestation of the natural and human life represented in art works. Everywhere the artist is free to choose among the materials, the truths, of art and what to make of them, but having chosen he must also strive forever for the realization of his choices. So, too, with the art works themselves and with the appreciators of art. Accordingly, the spirit of the artists seems to be seeking a way out through mediums of expression, the living truths of the art works seem to be forever trying for fuller self-revelations, and the life of the appreciators seems to be striving to know the whole inner nature of the art works whereby to know fully the divine essence of the things represented in art. Only as all activities and works of, or in connection with, art manifest this aspiration are they a part of genuine art, for only in this way do they become representative of life itself, with which art must always deal.¹

In aesthetics as in philosophy, again, the Will appears as identical with aspiration, or nearly so, at least. The artist's will is clearly represented as a power by virtue of which he feels the spiritual capacity to realize experiences or qualities that he may or may not ever actually realize. Sordello's will, for example, seems almost equivalent to his imagination, for it is referred to as his capacity to realize within himself all his images.² The struggle and effort of the artist's consciousness brings a potentiality with reference to his artistic conceptions and this, for Browning, is a success on his part whether it ever issues in actual art works or not. In the appreciator the same potentiality occurs and here it cannot issue in works of art. In any case, the will as aspiration is made a thing of the inner conscious-

1. Cf. esp. *Old Pictures*, 177; *Fra Lippo Lippi*, 344; *Abt Vogler*, 382; *The Ring and the Book*, III-442.

2. *Sordello*, V-115, and VI-120.

ness, and this accounts for the high place given individual personality in Browning's aesthetics, as we shall see.

Finally, and with respect to the methods of art still, progress also is carried over from its position in Browning's philosophy and is made the central and unifying principle of his aesthetics, as it was the central and unifying one of his philosophy. He declares that the artist must grow in the materials of life,—for him the materials of art,—the work of art must indicate a growth of the life dwelling within it, and the appreciator must find growth, too, from his appreciation of truths in the art works that are his pleasure. So the poet, thinking of his own effort in the production of "The Ring and the Book," says of man as artist,—

"Man,—as befits the made, the inferior thing,—
 Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn,
 Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow,—
 Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain
 The good beyond him,—which attempt is growth,—
 Repeats God's process in man's due degree,
 Attaining man's proportionate result,—
 Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps."

1

From the lines just quoted we see how probation and aspiration are both taken up into the progress principle and how the latter is made the whole and fundamental law of art. Elsewhere the same principle is made the basis for whatever classifications of the arts Browning has, for he divides art into Greek and Christian on this ground² and on the same measurements finds music or poetry the highest art expression.³ Everywhere, too, the life that he represents in his own works is on probation, it constantly aspires and strives, and usually meets failure as to physical or material accomplishment the while it achieves success

1. *The Ring and the Book*, I-421.

2. *Old Pictures in Florence*, 176.

3. *Abt Vogler*, 382; *Balaustion's Adventure*, 625.

and so makes progress insofar as sustained effort itself is always a progress in potentiality.

In the methods of art, then, as in the methods of life, it is seen that the central problem is the adjustment of the essence, the truths, to the embodiments by which the earthly manifestation of contents is always limited. This is the probational phase of the essence,—of the truths of art,—whether in the artist or in his products, and in proportion to the escape and triumph of the essence over the form limitations in that proportion progress appears in art. But instead of the final end of art because of the transcendence of its mediums by the essence or truth content, Browning, in disagreement with Hegel, sees in this rather the continual progress of art. On earth, he says, the artist must always use forms, art mediums, in which to embody the truths of his conception, but to make progress in art and to show his art progressive he must show the truths constantly less hampered by the mediums, constantly suggesting and approaching the state hereafter, not on earth, when these truths can entirely escape forms, or at least find other and higher forms than those conceivable to man. The central problem of Browning's aesthetics, then, as of romantic aesthetics before him, is that of adjusting the materials of art to the mediums of representation. In making progress his central principle, however, Browning's solution of the problem is in direct contrast to that of the romanticist aestheticians, for by this principle a growing inadequacy of the mediums to the materials is required such as is incompatible with the central aesthetic principle of these men.

The poet's theory with reference to the individual and the race was an especially significant one in his philosophy and next after his progress theory it is, perhaps, the most significant one carried over bodily into his aesthetics. In

his aesthetics as in his philosophy the poet is always an individualist. Here as there he believes that whatever gains there are these gains are primarily for the individual and for the race only through the individual. It was noted in his philosophy that the individualistic attitude was based upon the fact that consciousness of its own accord gives supremacy to the *Self* and that Soul and God are the only pure intuitions of the individual. In accordance with this, the higher the consciousness of self and the greater the intuitions of Soul and God so much the greater will the individual be above the race, or collective man. The artists represented by Browning have regularly a most intense self consciousness¹ and they are regularly men of the highest intuitions of the Soul and of God.² They are the most individualistic of men. They almost invariably feel a mystic communion with God, as though commissioned by him to do His work,³ and their artistic gift is always thought of as one directly from God.⁴

Again, the artist's personality always overtops any and all of his works, for his life is greater than they all.⁵ Likewise, his personality stands out distinctly from that of other men, though this is not meant in the sense that his life is to be different from theirs. He differs from other men only in the extent of his apprehensions of truth.⁶ He is, further, a seer, a "seeing soul," and all is

". Inert, stuff for transmutting, null
And void until man's breath evoke the beautiful." ⁷

The individual sees the beautiful everywhere because he stamps everything with his own life and individuality.⁸

1. Pauline, 4; Cleon, 360; Saul, XIV-182.

2. *Fifine at the Fair*, LX-714; *Essay on Shelley*, 1010.

3. *Pictor Ignotus*, 341; *Two Poets of Croisic*, LIX-864.

4. Cf. above references, among the many available.

5. *The Last Ride*, 267.

6. *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, Vol. I-527.

7. *Fifine at the Fair*, LX-714.

8. *R. C. N. C.*, 744.

He is one that would " . . . Be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all."¹ Yet he knows that so far as he realizes any one of his many aims he cramps his other faculties and so, desiring that his whole nature be developed, he realizes the many things that he fain would be only in his own inner consciousness, in his own imagination, and is potentially only the things he images.² Potentially, then, he is all men in one, he includes the multitude within himself. But he works for his new visions of truth and puts these visions into the works of art primarily for the development of his own individuality, for the growth of his own soul.³ Social and reform motives, the enfranchisement and aesthetic education of men, have very little part in the aims of his art production.⁴ Except as these things come through the individual himself they have no place in connection with art activities. The artist himself and his works, both revelations of high visions and deep insights, will indeed be regenerative forces,⁵ but even to attain this regenerative function for his works the artist's aim is and must ever be the development of himself as a distinct personality.

The role given the artist and his art in society is clearly seen in the theories just presented. Men are benefited by art, it is said, and to have been so benefited must ever be a secondary end of the artist, else he develops into the extreme individualist and egoist who works only to please himself and so works little at all or produces little of worth. What Browning says here is rather to the effect that the help artists bring to mankind must be brought unwitting-

1. *Pauline*, 5.

2. *Cleon*, 359.

3. *Pacchiarotto*, XXII-806.

4. *At the Mermaid*, 807. *Fotheringham: Studies in the Mind and Art of Robert Browning*, 63.

5. *Corson: Introduction to Browning*, 27.

ly, as a free gift with no definite good consciously intended. They bring, he says,

" . . . No gift that bounds itself and ends,
 I' the giving and the taking: theirs so breeds
 I' the heart and soul o' the maker, so transmutes
 The man who only was a man before,
 That he grows god-like in his turn, can give
 He also: share the poet's privilege,
 Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old." ¹

And if the artist annihilates self to the above ends it is only that he may realize himself the more, that is, that he may realize the more the divine immanent in himself. He combines the divine that he apprehends in all outside himself within himself, and so elevates himself above all and draws all men upward toward what he is, rather than distributes from himself to men. Those who climb toward what he is and toward what he puts from himself into his artistic representations rise to be Seers and Knowers in their own right.² And, finally, the thing mediated is, after all, not the human self but the surplusage of soul in the artist, the extraordinary store of the immanent divine in him.³ He above all others is able to say with Ferishtah, "I looked beyond the world for truth and beauty,"⁴ and those who get help from him have also looked upward and aspired to be able themselves to see God.

The last point to be noted in the correspondency between Browning's philosophy and his aesthetics is that with reference to the whole purpose and ultimate end of human life. As his philosophy declared that the world order and its life have evil and original sin inherent in them, due to the embodiment limitations of earth, but that this order and life as a whole might be found good by an increasing free-

1. Balaustion's Adventure, 625.

2. Cf. Chapter I, above.

3. Sordello, V-115.

4. Ferishtah's Fancies, XII-946.

dom of the immanent divine essence within the individual forms, so his aesthetics declares that art life, whether in artists, art representations, or the appreciators of art, is the same sort of existence and that the whole purpose here as elsewhere is just to find life good by the enfranchisement method indicated. The whole purpose of art life, as of any life, is to find life increasingly free for the spirit.

In the above view of life, life itself must always be greater than art and Browning always so represents it. Norbert says of other men in contrast to artists,—

"We live, and they experiment on life—
Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof
To overlook the farther." 1

In his own art the poet always attempts to represent life whole, so far as that is possible, whether by the representation of typical souls or by the representation of high critical moments in which the whole life purpose and development is reflected.² In any case

" Instinctive Art
Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire
To reconstruct the ultimate entire." 3

He realizes well, however, that art can only represent parts, for it is only parts that are known by

" The race of man
That receives life in parts to live as a whole
And grow here according to God's clear plan." 4

If the artist's life and work is a constant effort to express the whole, to have spirit transcend embodiment limitations, an effort that always fails of complete achievement on earth, then a future state in which this consummation is to be attained becomes the ultimate end for all art life as it is for the human life of which art activities are a part.

1. In a Balcony, 370.

2. Dowden: *Life of Browning*, 12. Sordello, Dedication, 74.

3. *Fifine at the Fair*, XLIV-712.

4. *Old Pictures in Florence*, 177.

Here the poet's philosophical eschatology even is carried over into his aesthetics and he wavers here also between a cycle existence and a fixed one for art activities in the hereafter. At times he seems to favor the cycle theory and asks, with reference to one artist's hereafter,—

"If such his soul's capacities,
Even while he trod the earth,—think, now
What pomp in Buonarroti's brow,
With its new palace-brain where dwells
Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
That crumbled with the transient clay!
What visions will his right hand's sway
Still turn to forms, as still they burst
Upon him?" 1

In general, however, for his artists, art conceptions, and art appreciators that have worked out their probations, aspired, and made their progress,—for all such he is sure only that there will be a future state of a higher order than that of earth. But for all who have so lived and endeavored to find life good and beautiful by the means of art he declares there will come eventual attainment, for there is,—

" . . . No beauty, nor good, nor power
Whose voice has gone forth, but each survives . . .
When eternity confirms the conception of an hour.
The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard,
The Passion that left the earth to lose itself in the sky,
Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard;
Enough that he heard it once: we shall hear it by and by." 2

Whether the hereafter has art forms or not this does not say, but it does give assurance that the ultimate end of artist, of art works, and of art appreciation will be the realization of all the conceptions of the good and the beautiful that have made up earth's unfulfilled aesthetic endeavors. Whatever may be thought of this as aesthetic theory it is a very practical and necessary part of Browning's aesthetics, for without this his progress principle leaves art entirely without a goal.

1. *Easter Day*, XXVI-333.
2. *Abt Vogler*, 383.

3. The Fundamental Theories and the Central Principle of Browning's Aesthetics.

In the foregoing sections an attempt was made to show the chief characteristics of Browning's aesthetics and to make clear how this aesthetics grew out of and is related directly to his philosophy. That the fundamental theories of his aesthetics must have already appeared in this attempt is obvious. It remains for the present section, then, to differentiate between these fundamental theories and the less important ones among which they lie, to indicate their place in the poet's aesthetics, and to take special note of the nature and application of the principle of progress as the central and unifying one of his whole theory of art.

Now it is clear from the nature of art itself that there are three phases of art to be explained by aesthetic theories; namely, the production of art, which has to do largely with the artist; the nature of art works, which deals chiefly with art materials and their uses; and the appreciation of art, which has reference mainly to those who contemplate and enjoy art works. In any aesthetics deserving the name, then, whatever its scheme of presentation otherwise, the various theories advanced might very properly be grouped around the three phases above mentioned. This was the scheme of procedure followed in the study of the aesthetics before Browning, and so it doubly recommends itself as a scheme well suited to the presentation of Browning's own art theories.

Wherever such a grouping as that just described is made by a student it is invariably discovered that the explanation of each of the three phases of art tends to employ a central theory or principle of its own, one that is subordinated to and dependent upon the central principle of the whole aesthetics under study, to be sure, but still a distinct

principle in its own right. In Browning's case it is found that he uses one such principle,—that of individual personality,—as central in explaining both the production and the appreciation of art, and another,—that of the mediation of truth,—as central in explaining the nature of art works. Outside of his theory as to progress, then, his ideas concerning individual personality and concerning the mediation of truth may be called his chief theories on art.

The first phase of art to be considered is art production, in the explanation of which one is concerned chiefly with the artist. This phase, as I have said, Browning explains by the use of the principle of individual personality. We have seen heretofore that he makes self-consciousness the first step in the development of personality and that he believes that an increase of culture works toward the increase of individuality. He insists, further, that this self-consciousness is, in reality, a consciousness of the divine immanent within one and that a discovery and an understanding of a like immanent essence in nature and man generally is the very means whereby to increase one's knowledge of the same essence in oneself and is, therefore, the one means to become increasingly a conscious individual.¹ Through his own high consciousness of the divine energy within himself the great personality finds a like essence in all outside himself and stamps himself upon a world otherwise

“ Inert
 . . . stuff for transmuting, null
 And void until man's breath evoke the beautiful.”²

And then where he has the added but subordinate power and the inclination to deliver this inner life, whether apprehended in himself or “out there,” in an embodiment

1. *La Saisiaz*, 853.

2. *Fifine at the Fair*, LV-714.

" . Answering to and indicative of the process of the informing spirit,"¹ then he becomes an artist and the issues of his individuality appear as art works.

So far as the great individual impresses himself upon dead, inert stuff he seems to reanimate nature only, but where he does this as an artist and upon forms of his own artistry, here he appears in the role of a creator. His aspiration as artist to realize all life within himself and to image it in fit forms are manifestations of his will, his imagination, and his genius. His potential capacity to realize more within himself than he can actually embody in forms gives him a feeling of supremacy that is a sort of irony toward the world. Because all these things are dependent upon the artist's individuality the various theories to which they give rise are all subordinate ones to the individual personality theory, in Browning's aesthetics, and are to be dealt with as such in explaining the artist and his productivity. In the growth of individuality and in the embodiment of the individual's successive developments in his art products is seen the growth principle itself upon which the individual personality one depends and which is clearly in evidence also in all the subordinate theories dependent, in their turn, upon that of personality.

The nature of art products, a matter having to do chiefly with art materials and their uses, is explained in Browning's aesthetics as a mediation of truth. In the art work the artist embodies his intuitions of the inner life of nature and man, intuitions in the form of truths that he has apprehended in himself or in nature and man outside himself. Because part of these intuitions are apprehended in man outside himself, the truths embodied always tend to give the notions of the artist's own time concerning the nature

1. Essay on Shelley, 1011.

of the universe,¹ but because they are partly from within himself, too, they may also give notions in advance of his time. In any case, so far as he is a developing personality and a great artist, the truths of his intuitions will increase because of his conquest over his own embodiment and over the natural and human embodiments that make up the world external to him. Accordingly, his art will also manifest these truths as increasingly free from the embodiment limitations in which they are artistically clothed and will increasingly become "A sublime fragmentary essay toward a presentment of the correspondency of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the ideal."²

It is obvious that the truth here in reference is one that combines the concepts of intellect, the potentialities of will, and the emotional elements,—all the materials of art in Browning's aesthetics. It is obvious, too, that these truths and the individual personality previously characterized are very nearly, if not altogether, identical in nature. The relativity of these truths leaves something always unexpressed by the art in which they occur, something suggested beyond what the mediums make manifest. In this sense they are representative of the whole process of life itself, which also evidences a striving toward something higher and beyond what the body in which it dwells can make manifest. This inadequacy of the medium to the truth content, or from the opposite standpoint, this transcendence of its mediums by the truth content, this Browning considers the highest quality of art. The methods of art with which his theory deals have to do, then, with the putting of growing intuitions of truth into such forms that an increasing freedom of truth over forms is manifested.

1. Milsand: Robert Browning, in *Revue des deux Mondes*, XI-661.

2. *Essay on Shelley*, 1014.

It is readily apparent that matters such as the purpose of art and the classification of the various arts are involved with the degree of success attained in embodying truths in this manner. All these give rise to theories that are subordinate to the theory on the mediation of truth, and underlying these subordinate theories and the central one as to mediation, also, one sees clearly and constantly the principle of progress.

The last of the three phases of art to be considered is that of appreciation, a matter having reference principally to the persons involved in the process, and this phase Browning explains, as he does art production, by the principle of individual personality. He attempts to show that the appreciations of art come in the way of intuitions of truth to those who have the aesthetic experience and that the appreciators thereby increase their store of the materials of art, which are also the materials of life, and so by this means attain to individuality in their own right through art's assistance. While the theory of personal individuality is central, then, in explaining the appreciation of art, this theory itself is still dependent, like all the other theories of Browning's aesthetics, upon his theory concerning the principle of growth or progress. Subordinate to it are various theories having to do with judgment, taste, objectification, *Einfühlung*, and similar matters to be found regularly in explanations of the appreciation and effects of art.¹ Through these, as well as through their central principle, that of individual personality, the principle of progress is a constant and basic factor.

The central and unifying role of the progress principle throughout all the principles and theories thus far dealt

1. It is to be understood that the terms here used are seldom found in Browning, but what is described by them leaves no doubt as to the applicability of these generally accepted designations of aesthetic experiences.

with has now been a matter of such frequent comment and explanation that it really needs little further note. We have seen how growth was made a basic principle in personality and how relativity and consequent growth in truth was made a necessary manifestation of art works. The analysis could be extended to the discovery of the principle in all the major and minor theories of Browning's aesthetics, for it is, as has been pointed out, a principle that Browning finds operative in all life and activity, that of art as well as that of less ideal and more easily understood fields.

Because of the poet's special interest in the inner life rather than the outer, an application of his growth principle to his own works is extremely difficult. It will be remembered that he requires the work of art itself to manifest or represent the growth principle. He well realized, of course, that some arts, poetry included, can indicate action, and he might have used this poetic possibility to the end in point; but instead he pointedly repudiates the use of external machinery and events and chooses to employ only motives, thoughts, feelings, intangible things of the inner life. Although he does not deal intelligibly with the matter in his theory, he solves the difficulty in his practice by representing life at a high critical moment such as may well stand for the whole life in perspective, and in such a manner that the events before and after are implied or suggested by that one moment's posture. This, then, is the way of Browning's attempt to indicate *being* and *becoming* at one and the same time in a work that is itself a static thing.

It is possible that the poet's knowledge, thought, and feeling were so deep and complex that they were out of all proportion with his powers of expression, and that this has something to do with his particular application of the

growth theory to art.¹ One can easily see how an artist gifted in deep and high thinking and feeling and lacking in expressive powers might very naturally and almost unconsciously argue for an art that was increasingly packed with meanings which its mediums of expression were increasingly unable to make fully manifest. An artist of Browning's gifts and beliefs otherwise might well think such an art alone the progressive one, since this sort of art alone seemed to him constantly to approach the state, completely attainable only in the after life, when forms are entirely surmounted and when thought and feeling, the spirit life's activities, are altogether and permanently free. But there is more to the matter than this, for Browning repeatedly argues for the necessity of a certain degree of harmony between form and spirit on earth and he gave repeated assurance that his own endeavor was to round fact and fancy into a perfect ring in art works.² It was not a mere deficiency in expressive powers that accounted for his theory, then; it was rather the most vital part of his whole philosophy of life. Believing that it is art's business to represent life and that life is always an increasing freedom of the human spirit within the limitations of flesh and form, his theory, therefore, that only by means of art mediums increasingly inadequate to their truth contents could he best image life as he found it, was in every way consistent with and nicely determined by his whole philosophy of life. Even in art,—he says it both in his theory and in his practice,—there must be a nomad life of the spirit else that life becomes native to its one form, conventional, and contented with a medium that was meant only for a challenging antagonist to be gradually triumphed over and eventually altogether outlived.

1. Cf. Alfred Tennyson, *A Memoir by his Son*, Vol II-344.

2. *The Ring and the Book*, I-418.

The growth principle used as the central and unifying one in an aesthetics has implications as to the historical progress of art also. Thus we find that Browning rates Christian art above Greek art on the ground that it manifests a freedom of the truth content over the form such as was altogether lacking from the works of the ancients.¹ But if the modern is an improvement over the Greek art, and if art must still continue its progress, as he says, Browning still attempts no indication of what the future stages of that progress will be. If it is his idea that new forms shall also develop that are increasingly able to manifest more of spirit while they themselves grow constantly less attentionable, then his theory is a happy one for those wishing to learn the nature of the whole inner life of thought and feeling, **but it must ever be a sad one for those who love and find meaning also in the beauties of shapes and colors and lines.** But the theory is an impossible one in some aspects, anyway, as Hegel already discovered,² for the adequacy of medium and content in some degree and form or other must always be an inescapable necessity of the fine arts. Browning's unanswerable alternative at this point, of course, is to carry all over into the after life cycle where progress might continue or stand, the aesthetic conceptions would still be realized in a realm concerning whose forms there can be no answerable questions. The transcendence of art and the exaltation of philosophy had no terrors for him, then, for earth might solve its own problems so far as possible and leave the rest for the time when "Eternity confirms the conception of an hour."³

1. *Old Pictures in Florence*, 177.

2. Cf. Chapter I, Section 5, above.

3. *Abt Vogler*, 383.

CHAPTER IV.

BROWNING'S THEORIES AS TO THE ARTIST.

1. General Characteristics as Man and Artist.

The artist of Browning's description is a man of distinct personality, highly conscious of his special powers for apprehending and reproducing the inner truths of the natural and human worlds, and capable of growth in these powers. He has

" . . . A special gift, an art of arts,
More insight and more oversight and much more
Will to use both of these than boast (his) mates." ¹

He is not satisfied with the common understanding of things, but seeks to know the inner life, the thoughts, motives, feelings back of all the external phenomena. Because of these things he manifests a growth in his powers, a growth in "Authority over the reasons and the passions, and that wonderful variety of the plastic power."² In his powers and in their development he indicates at once the principle of personality and the principle of growth at work in an artistic individuality.

Yet in spite of all this, and because his characteristics and qualities are merely

"The fullest effluence of the finest mind,
All in degree, no way diverse in kind
From minds about it, minds which, more or less,
Lofty or low, move seeking to impress
Themselves;" ³

because of this the artist is never a Brahmin of a higher

1. *The Ring and the Book*, I-421.

2. *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, Vol. II-14.

3. *Sordello*, V-115

caste, nor does he find necessary any different sort of life from that of his fellows. It is a very distinct pronouncement of Browning's theory, and one in which he differs radically from the romantic aestheticians before him, that the artist's life should be quite the ordinary life of a man among his fellow beings. Browning seems to take special pride in writing of himself that "Milnes said I was the only literary man he ever knew, tenex propositi, able to make out a life for himself and abide in it."¹ The poet, he says, must "Remain the man nor ape the muse."² The poet is one that has not

" Spurned the common life,
Nor vaunted (his) a lyre to match the muse
Who sings for gods, not men!" 3

In fine, an artist, in Browning's opinion, is to be a normal, sensible person, living his life among men, on terms of friendly intercourse with them, for it is always partly among men that he apprehends the divine essence in the form of truth, power, and love; it is always partly from his living fellow-beings that he gets his store of the materials of art.

The presence and operation of his high gifts leave their impress upon the external physical characteristics of the artist to some extent. A high brow, for example, is a regular feature of the artists Browning represents,⁴ and he declares that the artist's physical form generally is framed to suit the gifted soul that dwells within. So he says of Sordello,—

"(The delicate nostril swerving wide and fine,
A sharp and restless lip, so well combine
With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive
Delight at every sense; you can believe

1. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-527.

2. Aristophanes' Apology, 676.

3. *ibid.*, 677.

4. *ibid.*, 628; By the Fireside, 187.

Sordello foremost in the regal class
 Nature has broadly severed from her mass
 Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames
 Some happy lands
 You recognize at once the finer dress
 Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness
 At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled
 (As though she would not trust them with her world.)
 A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,
 And lets but half the sun look fervid through."¹

The description would well fit almost any of Browning's artists and well indicates the physical marking which he believes artists generally manifest.

To live in accordance with the various characteristics above mentioned artists cannot be freaks of whim and caprice,² nor, if they are to be true to the high function of understanding all men, can they become students and leaders in any one field alone. 'Theirs is the faculty of

" Knowing how
 And showing how to live . . . " ³

rather than actually living the various roles of mankind in particularized activities. As artists their lives must be among men, among men of other times and places than their own as well, but their activities there must be of the mind, imaging the many parts men play and then reproducing their images in works of art. "Teaching maids and sewing—gloves" can be no regular part of a poetess' duty and vocation, for example, if she is to avoid wasting the special gift she possesses.⁴ Artists are to know and be all men in the imagination only so that they may, indeed, have a special field in which to do God's work; and to shift their activities to those of other people, whether into political, social, religious, or other fields, is to waste their divine

1. Sordello, I-79.

1. Ibid., I-88.

3. Cleon, 360.

4. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-477.

gift,—and this no matter how high a function the other fields may have in their own right.¹ They seek to know real as well as ideal life, but do not attempt to live all the experiences of either of these realms except in their own inner consciousness. They must have a practical side else their lives become like

“ That of those whose heaven
Was lampless save where poesy shone out.”²

They have this practical side in order to understand all phases of life and be all kinds of men in potentiality. They must be all men and yet remain always themselves realizing the life of others only in the images and chronicles bodied forth from their inner consciousness into the art works they produce. They are those who

“Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire
To reconstruct the ultimate entire.”³

Because of all these things they are those who, if they were perfect in their gifts, had

“Chronicled the stages of all life.”⁴

The artist's role, then, is to live a normal life among men, performing there his own peculiar function, which is to study the inner nature of all men and of all their surroundings so that he may realize within himself all that he apprehends and then body it forth in mediums fit to represent it. And he does this chiefly in order to realize to the full his own inner nature, which, as we have seen, is to be all life in one and so to afford, as nearly as possible on earth, a glimpse of the absolute whole. The aim and purpose, then, is largely an ethical one in the artist's own behalf; it is a working out of his own probation that he

1. *The Boy and the Angel*, 253.

2. *Pauline*, 5.

3. *Fifine at the Fair*, XLIV-712.

4. *Pauline*, 10.

accomplishes in his art life, and this by use of his special gifts employed in accordance with his aspiration to " . . . Be all, have, see, know, taste, feel, all . . ."¹ This is to make what progress man can toward the higher life hereafter when his conceptions of the hour will all be realized. To this view Browning returns again and again. It is expressed by Pauline's lover, Sordello, Aprile, Pictor Ignotus, Andrea del Sarto, and a host of others. What their arts will do for themselves is made the chief concern of these men, in Browning's representation of them, and they are everywhere shown to be somewhere on the way to working out their own salvations by a constant approach to the full and permanent realization of their ever-growing conceptions. The final end lies only in the hereafter, to be sure, but only as the individual artist has made his progress toward this, here and now, does he fit himself for that final complete afterlife realization of earthly conceptions and for the possibility of new and higher conceptions in the higher cycles that may, perhaps, await his artistry,

"There as here!" 2

To make the progress above indicated, artists must constantly strive to get their conceptions into art works. " . . . Else parturition will be the curse indeed."³ Theirs it is to try to represent what they apprehend, "Careless what comes of it."⁴ The doing, or trying to do, is their way of salvation. "I must," says Sordello,

"I must ere I begin to Be,
Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend
In spirit now. . . ."

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1. *Ibid.*, 5.
 2. Epilogue to *Asalando*, 1007.
 3. Browning and Domett, 128.
 4. *Fra Lippo Lippi*, 345.
 5. *Sordello*, III-94.

They have

"God's gift to gladden the heart of man:"

yes, but

"Spirit's at proof, I promise that!"¹

and "The love of displaying power for the display's sake; the love of riches, of distinction, of notoriety; the desire of a triumph over rivals, and the vanity in the applause of friends" . . . : none of these lower incitements . . . "have been found able . . . to task themselves to the end of so exacting a performance as a poet's complete work."² Artists must work, and attain results, to be sure, but all aims except that higher and unattainable aim that has no end here, all other aims bring only regrets and mockery, for

" . . . When all's done, how vain seems e'en success—
The vaunted influence poets have o'er men!

And then I know this curse will come on us,
To see our idols perish;

To find the painter's glory pass, and feel
Music can move us not as once "3

There is no doubt that to "Gladden the heart of man," to win his "British Public,"⁴ to bring a gift such as

" So breeds
I' the heart and soul o' the taker, so transmutes
The man who only was a man before.
That he grows godlike in his turn, can give—
He also: share the poet's privilege,
Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old." 5

there is no doubt, I say, that these were urgent aims with Browning at many moments of his lifetime, but they were not sufficient alone to sustain his continued efforts, nor

1. Epilogue to *Pacchiarotto*, 829.

2. *Essay on Shelley*, 1010.

3. *Pauline*, 7.

4. *The Ring and the Book*, XII-601.

5. *Balaustion's Adventure*. 625

did he consider them sufficient and worthy ends to justify the struggle and effort essential to an artist's life work. However lacking in definite accomplishments the prospect, he still held firmly to his theory that the artist's purpose is not merely the production of technically perfect works of a certain number or kind that should win men's applause, but rather the life exercise of his powers in gaining ever higher conceptions of the inner truths of all things and in exerting ever more intense efforts to realize the embodiment of these conceptions in fit mediums, thereby to grow ever more capable of new advances in both. The artist's whole function, he declares, is to reproduce the truths he apprehends in nature and man in such a way as to awaken premonitions of the absolute truth and beauty. The artist reproduces his own anticipations of the divine so as to stimulate less penetrating visions to a more perfect perception of the absolute; but this only secondarily, for to do this, even, he must first stimulate himself to ever renewed efforts to find and make everywhere more manifest the divine: otherwise he merely establishes a level on which to stagnate. His gift is from God and toward Him; it must be employed in discovering ever new apprehensions of God's immanent essence and in embodying his discoveries in mediums ever less restrictive of the spiritual essence, for thus alone the transcendent essence itself that gave the gift is approached. This, in Browning's opinion, is the whole life purpose and aim of the artist, and if he says at times that the work to this end is the perfecting of the mediums of expression¹ he is thinking here only of the day by day routine that must ever accomplish the day by day dreams that go to make up a whole life's purpose if there is anywhere and everywhere to be progress. And then, finally, the artist who has so striven and so

1. Browning and Domett, 126.

aspired and made progress is greater in his life than in any and all of his works. His life began before and continues after any and all of them.¹ He has not apprehended and conceived all, but not even all of that which he has apprehended and conceived can attain complete embodiment in his art works, for these things surpass the possibilities of embodiment just as the inner nature of things in embodiments everywhere and always surpasses the ability of embodied being to apprehend and conceive completely. Life is always above art, and the artist who creates stands over and above his creations, an individual personality, always progressing in personal individuality and, in this, always in advance of his subordinate progress in reproducing his conceptions in the representations that we call art.²

2. The Artist's Preparation and His Methods of Conception: Subjective and Objective Artists.

To make his own life the large and all-inclusive sort of being that it must necessarily become the artist must have lived all the experiences of all the beings that he conceives and executes in art, but he cannot, as we have seen, live these in actual experience, consequently he must undergo the experiences within his inner consciousness only. Obviously the most widely travelled and widely ranging life of man among his fellows that human possibilities permit would not be sufficient to make up a universal experience such as is here demanded from the inner consciousness. Such a roving course of life would too much dissipate the activities of the artist even if it did accomplish the desired ends otherwise, so instead of mixing, acting and enjoying with men, however these calls to action may tempt, he

1. *Sordello*, III-98.

2. *The Last Ride*, 267; *Cleon*, 360; et. al.

must supplement real life by touching other lives of other times and places through the books and works of art in which they have their being. In this way Browning himself confesses to have come upon "Many forgotten fields which prove the richest of pastures,"¹ and he writes elsewhere that "You must read books—if you write."² Having made his experience universal in the manner here indicated, the artist is then able to say with Pauline's lover,

"I am prepared: I have made life my own.
I would not be content with all the change
One frame should feel, but I have gone in thought
Through all conjecture, I have lived all life
When it was most alive, where strangest fate
New-shapes it past surmise " 3

In "Sordello" Browning describes at some length "How a poet's soul comes into play" and "What denotes such a soul's progress."⁴ The preparation of artists generally must, in his opinion, be very like that he ascribes to Sordello. He says that there is a period wherein the poet-to-be receives delight at every sense and then invests all he delights in with life from his own soul, giving his entire self to what he worships. Afterward the artist will brood upon the inpourings and then, for need of sympathizers, will create a company of these, allowing each to live his own life in his fancy. As still new inpourings modify and enlarge the company and the separate figures of the company, some one figure arises to tower above the others, including them all, and so becomes the artist's own inner ideal, the model for his own being and for the being that he would give embodiment in art works whereby to image clearly to himself the things he would wish to be, the divine whole transcending his own form. But in the begin-

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1. Mrs. Orr: *Life and Letters of Robert Browning*, 378.
 2. *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, Vol. I-41.
 3. Pauline, 8.
 4. *Sordello*, I-79.

ning this whole process seems to be set going by books. The "Pauline" passage below is evidently an account of Browning's own experience, but it indicates well what he supposes to be an early experience of artists generally. Of the outer lives that come out of the legendary past to swarm in his fancy Pauline's lover has this to say:

"They came to me in my first dawn of life
Which passed alone with wisest ancient books,
All halo-girt with fancies of my own;
And I myself went with the tale—a god
Wandering after beauty, or a giant
Standing vast in the sunset—an old hunter
Talking with gods, or a high-crested chief
Sailing with troops of friends to Tenedos.
I tell you, naught has ever been so clear
As the place, the time, the fashion of those lives:
I had not seen a work of lofty art,
Nor woman's beauty nor sweet nature's face,
Yet, I say, never morn broke clear as those
On the dim clustered isles in the blue sea,
The deep groves and white temples and wet caves:
And nothing will ever surprise me now—
Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed,
Who bound my forehead with Proserpine's hair." ¹

Such is the beginning of an artist's life and from this he goes on to the appreciation of the art works of some Goito's castle² or to amateur performances of his own on the drawing board.³ But these, too, soon fail to suffice, and the creatures of his fancy press to be confirmed and supplemented by those of real life, and when this time comes the artist must mix with men and see nature herself whereby to learn "the look of things"⁴ at first hand. When this is done he is ready for the beginning of his life work; and ever after he alternates between books and art and the lives of men about him as sources of renewed inspiration and renewed materials of life for his art.⁵

1. Pauline, 5.

2. Sordello, I-78.

3. James Lee's Wife, VIII-376.

4. Fra Lippo Lippi, 343.

5. Francis Furini, 964 ff.

In the ways above specified the artist's mind is stored with the ideas or truths which become for him the materials of art. He has not hunted and made jottings of ideas,¹ but he has hunted life itself, and out of his search and findings have come, in flashes here and there, the truths that make clear what life is,—

" The secret of the world,
Of man, and man's true purpose, path and fate." 2

These truths, so flashed to him, he has generalized into concepts concerning the nature of the world and its life, but for the purposes of art he needs to throw his generalizations back into the concrete again, so he takes incidents, events, particular lives, things fit to carry and illustrate the ideas, and, imaging and emotionalizing all from himself, he bodies forth the truths thus reanimated into a representation and interpretation of their original existences in the natural or human world.³ To do this he may need to live the original experience over again in his own imagination.⁴ It may be that the original ideas, the concrete particulars to illustrate them, and the imaging and emotionalizing all three break upon him suddenly and simultaneously.⁵ Browning's usual description of the processes here involved, however, makes the original apprehension of the ideas or truths a first step by itself, one capable of being carried on by any great personality; and he believes that the genuine artistic conception, made from a selective and suggestive concentration of these ideas, comes afterward and as a special creation possible only to the artist. When this artistic conception is made is the moment when the ideas are likely or even need to be lived over again and this, too, is the moment when the selective

1. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-292.

2. Paracelsus I-15.

3. A Death in the Desert, 391.

4. Letters, op. cit., Vol. II-2.

5. Mrs. Orr: Handbook to Browning's Works, 55.

ideas and the forms fit to embody them flash simultaneously upon the artist. The actual embodiment into an art medium, the actual execution of the art product, comes still afterward and is the slower task of a subordinate power in the artist; and it is while this slower task is in process that the surroundings and circumstances of the artist's life will have a considerable influence upon the product, however paramount even here the original apprehension of ideas and the later artistic conception of the work must ever be.¹

A quite satisfactory summary of the artist's whole process, as analyzed above from Browning's theory and practice, is that which Henry Taylor gave of his procedure, namely,—“Observation of facts; generalization from facts observed; rejection into the concrete, but with improvements from the fancy of the general conclusions obtained.”² If the artist has conceived as an artist what he cannot have experienced as a man, this part of the product is the work of the fancy which runs before the fact and improves it, but always there must have been some experience of fact or other from which fancy intuited an existence not externally manifested in the fact.³ It is due to this fact that when the artist comes to build his work of art he seems often to have worked backward, to have seen his denouement first.⁴ The central idea seems the starting point and from this, seen in imaged form, he seems to have traced back to the motives, thoughts, feelings, and sensations that gave it birth, and he then locates these in imaginary or historical characters, in objects and environments, fit to mediate such phenomena of the inner life and spirit. In a philosophical age, indeed, as Vico says,⁵ the

1. Essay on Shelley, 1011.

2. Berdoo: Browning as a Scientific Poet, B. S. P., Vol. II-36.

3. The Ring and the Book, I-419.

4. Cf. Henry James: Views and Reviews, 46-7.

5. Parker: Lectures on the Hist. of Aes., 3/19/20.

artist is forced to throw philosophical ideas back into the concrete, to bring the intellect back into its childhood, so to speak, among the sensations, images, and emotions wherein it first gathered the materials for its concepts. Browning's own age and his own theorizing nature, then, account for the theory and practice above ascribed to him. His own wording of the theory is best stated, perhaps, in "A Death in the Desert" where the dying John compares life to the process of art, in this fashion:

"The statuary ere he mould a shape
Boasts a like gift, the shape's idea, and next
The aspiration to produce the same;
So, taking clay, he calls the shape thereout,
Cries ever 'Now I have the thing I see.'
Yet all the while goes changing what was wrought
From falsehood like the truth, to truth itself." ¹

That this method of procedure was both theory and practice for Browning anyone may determine to his entire satisfaction by a careful study of his explanation of "The Ring and the Book."²

The most spontaneous and significant of the steps in the whole art process, as above described, was, in Browning's opinion, that of the immediate conception of the art work. "I believe," he says, " . . . in the great principle of all composition, . . . in the great principle of Shakespeare, Rafael, and Beethoven, . . . from whence it follows that concentration of ideas is due much more to their conception than to their manner of execution,"³ and elsewhere he writes to Miss Barrett that "One should study the mechanical part of the art, as nearly all that is to be studied."⁴ In a similar vein he writes to Domett that to try to add to one's powers " . . . To imagine, to create, or whatever they call it—as well endeavor to add a cubit

1. A Death in the Desert, 391.

2. The Ring and the Book, I-414, IX-541, XII-601.

3. Note to "Pauline," translated in Cooke: Guidebook, 85.

4. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-98.

to your stature. *Nascitur poeta*—and that conceded to happen, the object of labour is naturally what you recommend to me.”¹ What Domett had recommended was just that the poet ought to take more pains to perfect the medium of his expression. And we are told, too, that the execution of art works is attained by powers of the artist which are subordinate to his apprehending and conceiving powers and that the execution is a slow and painstaking process and of the nature of routine work.² All this is to make of the execution of art works largely a performance of technical skill and a far less important matter than the continual spontaneous apprehensions of truths by great personalities, to say nothing of that greatest step of all in the process, the artistic conception of these truths whereby they are at once imaged in the forms that they afterward take when the art works themselves are actually produced.

In various expositions of his theory Browning takes special pains to point out that the whole life that gave birth to the ideas, or truths, cannot be imaged in the art conception and that not even all of the life that the artist lived over for his artistic conception can be there indicated or included when the ideas are thrown back into the concrete again, so there is required a selection of such incidences and evidences of thought, motive, and feeling as will suggest the desired whole and the striking out entirely of many associated ideas that are unessential to the embodied living truth of the final product.

“Image the whole, then execute the parts—

Fancy the fabric

“Quite, ere you build, ” ³

says the speaker in “A Grammarian’s Funeral.” It is pointed out, further, too, that no one artist can give even

1. Browning and Domett, 126.

2. Essay on Shelley, 1011; A Death in the Desert, 390.

3. A Grammarian’s Funeral, 279.

one whole truth, even at his best selection, consequently various artists give their nearest possible approaches to the whole, and all of their works taken together still fall short of the absolute truth, a representation of which was attempted in each of them. Each takes his step and all are but steps toward the manifestation of the whole vision which is ever limited by the forms of the artists themselves and by the forms in which they must embody the parts of the vision given them to see.¹ God alone is the perfect artist,

"Who in his person acts his own creations." 2

Among the materials of art, apprehended and stored within himself by the artist, there can be no absolute distinctions drawn between those from outside sources and those from within the artist himself. There is no absolute distinction possible between the universal ideas furnished by religion, tradition, civilization, et cetera, and the ideas from the individuality and genius of the artist himself.³ In Browning's opinion, truth is both "within ourselves" and "out there,"⁴ and the artist's apprehensions are just his intuitions of how the truth "out there" is identical with his own. He may look chiefly outward or chiefly inward, but the materials from without and within are always mixed more or less and those from without always bear the impress of those within. Just on the ground that there may be a preponderance of an inward or outward source, or of an inward or outward appeal, however, Browning distinguishes two kinds of poets, the objective and subjective. The distinction is connected with the preparation of poets and with their methods of artistic conception, so it is worthy of note and its discussion occurs properly at

1. Easter Day, XXVIII-334.

2. Paracelsus, II-25.

3. Cf. Carritt: *Theory of Beauty*, 80.

4. Paracelsus, I-18; *Fifine at the Fair*, CXXIV-733.

this point, even though the distinction has other connections than those mentioned and is not extended to artists other than poets.

In "Sordello"¹ the distinction made between the objective and subjective poet is put upon a threefold basis; namely, the attitude to nature, the attitude to God, and the attitude to man. In the first instance the objective poet is said to objectify himself into the beautiful forms of his conception, while the subjective one refers all beauties at once to something of beauty revealed within himself. Next, the objective poet sees the earthly forms combine until, by a touch divine in his works, he sees "Visibly through his garden walketh God." The subjective poet, on the other hand, soars "To heaven's complexest essence" and himself grows "equal to being all." Lastly, and with reference to his attitude to man now, the objective poet cannot bear the crowd to see his face, he stands aloof because he is inclined, like Paracelsus, to look in the external world rather than in man for truth.² The subjective poet, on the contrary, wants and needs sympathizers. He looks within himself, chiefly, and so far as he looks outside it is to men rather than to nature. But he looks chiefly to himself, so he wants praise and sympathy. The objective poets are those most likely to rest satisfied with what is attained, for they find themselves in all and so, being all themselves, there is no need of further effort and they, therefore, "forego their just inheritance." In contrast, the subjective poets desire

" To put all
That nature forth, forcing our straightened sphere
Contain it,—to display completely here
The mastery another life should learn,
Thrusting in time eternity's concern,—" ³

1. *Sordello*, I-79 ff.

2. Cf. Josiah Royce: *Fugitive Essays*, 386.

3. *Sordello*, I-81.

They would attempt the whole purpose, the absolute, at once and on earth, and so neglect the immediate task which must lead step by step toward the whole task and can never immediately nor completely compass it.

On another basis, that of what it is that the poets do with the materials of art, there is in "Sordello" a three-fold classification of the poets themselves. As Browning himself, as a poet, puts it,—

"For the worst of us to say we have seen;
For the better, what it was they saw; the best
Impart the gift of seeing to the rest: . . ." 1

The first of these tells a simple story of his impressions and is the epoist, the second presents the general rather than the individual aspect and is the dramatist, while the third brings out the deeper significance of things never seen without the poet's aid and is the Seer, or Maker-See. To the latter class *Sordello* belongs and such a poet Browning himself aspires to be.² Such an one, at any rate, is valued above the others, although it is admitted that all three have their places. Of the three kinds both the epoists and the dramatists are objective; both are analytic and both are Makers or Fashioners: while the third class, the Seers, are subjective, synthetic, and so rank as Makers-See.³

The distinction between the objective and subjective poet is still more clearly drawn in the "Essay on Shelley."⁴ Here the objective artist is declared to be " . . . One whose endeavor has been to reproduce things external (whether the phenomena of the scenic universe, or the manifested action of the human heart and brain), with an immediate reference to the common eye and apprehension of his fellow-men." . . . He has " . . . the double

1. *Ibid.*, III-100.

2. Cf. *Sordello*, II-89; III-100; and IV-111.

3. *Ibid.*, V-116.

4. *Essay on Shelley*, 1008 ff.

faculty of seeing external objects more clearly, widely, and deeply than . . . the average mind, at the same time that he is so acquainted and in sympathy with its narrower comprehension as to be careful to supply it with no other materials than it can combine into an intelligible whole." He is "the fashioner; and the thing fashioned . . . will of necessity be substantive, projected from himself and distinct." His work "each of us receives for the first time as creation, and is hereafter left to deal with—as—he best may," that is, without help from the author.

The subjective poet is a "genius of an opposite tendency . . . He, gifted like the objective poet with the fuller perception of nature and man, is impelled to embody the thing he perceives, not so much with reference to the many below as to the one above him, the supreme intelligence which apprehends all things in their absolute truth,—an ultimate view ever aspired to, if but partially attained, by the poet's own soul. Not what man sees, but what God sees,—the *Ideas* of Plato, seeds of creation lying burningly on the Divine Hand,—it is toward these that he struggles." He has to do with "the primal elements of humanity" and so prefers to "seek in his own soul as the nearest reflex of that absolute Mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak." Such a poet is "rather a seer . . . than a fashioner, and what he produces will be less a work than an effluence," and such an "effluence" cannot be considered in abstraction from its author's personality since it is the "very radiance and aroma of his personality, projected from it but not separated."

The distinction between the two kinds of poets, as Browning sees it, is not so much an essential one "in the faculty of the two poets, or in the nature of the objects contemplated by either of them," as it is "in the more immediate adaptability of these objects to the distinct pur-

pose of each," for the objective poet aims to appeal to the aggregate human mind and is therefore purposely dramatic and analytic, while the subjective poet appeals through himself to the absolute Mind and is therefore purposely lyrical and synthetic.

It is said, further, that "It would be idle to inquire, of these two kinds of poetic faculty in operation, which is the higher or even rarer endowment," for "If the subjective might seem . . . the ultimate requirement of every age, the objective . . . must still retain its original value." The two seem to be alternating necessities, for "there is a time when the general eye has . . . absorbed its fill of the phenomena around it, whether spiritual or material, and desires rather to learn the exacter significance of what it possesses than to receive any augmentation of what is possessed." This is the opportunity of the subjective poet. But, the subjective poet's refining and intensifying for his synthesis once exhausted, then the need again arises for "a supply of the fresh and living swathe, . . . new substance by breaking up the assumed wholes into parts of independent and unclassed value, . . . objects for men's outer and not inner sight," and here the objective poet has his time again. The analytic and synthetic functions of the objective and subjective poets, then, seem to be successively essential, the one to bring new ranges of experience with things and the other to bring synthesizations of the new in the light of all, and both their bringings give way to further ranges and further synthesizations in a continually progressive alternation.

Up to his own time Browning had not found the subjective and objective modes of the poetic faculty united in any single poet, but had found one mode predominating here and there, with the other one running in, upon it more or less. He says he sees no reason, however, why the two

may not hereafter issue in successive works from the same author, and there can be no doubt but that Browning himself aspired to be a poet who united the two powers in himself and gave them manifestation in his works.

3. Special Impulses, Powers, and Faculties of Artists.

To account for and make somewhat understandable the mysterious, inaccessible, and unexplainable processes of art conception and art production, which their general definitions of these processes are altogether unable to make clear, the aestheticians have quite uniformly resorted to various theories relative to certain impulses, powers, and faculties which they claim to find operative as special controlling forces in the artist at the moments of artistic apprehension, conception, and production. The general definitions of the processes have also influenced and been influenced by these theories.

Browning's aesthetics is quite in accord with the above-described procedure. He clearly distinguishes three more or less separate steps in the artist's whole process and, as we have seen, defines the first step as a spontaneous and immediate intuition of the ideas, or truths, which comprise the materials of art; the second step, artistic conception, as a spontaneous and immediate selective and suggestive concentration of these ideas into imaged embodiments such as manifest, as nearly as possible, the wholes of which they themselves are only relative parts; and the third step, art production, as the subordinate and mechanical process of executing the imaged embodiments of artistic conception into art mediums. In accordance with these general definitions he has his theories, too, as to the special impulses, powers, and faculties at work in artists during all or some of the steps in the whole art process. It is with these theories that we have now to deal.

A. Impressionism.

In the first place, the artist is found to be an impressionistic being, both on the receptive and expressive sides of his nature. He apprehends things by flashes, intuitions, by parts that reflect the wholes, by

“ a sunset touch
A fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death,
A chorus-ending from Euripides,”¹

and he afterward images selected and suggestive ones of these apprehensions into concentrated wholes that, in their turn, reflect the wholes of which they really contain only these selected flashes or intuitions. In the impressionistic moments of the artist his art materials have their spontaneous generation and in other like moments the concentrations from these materials become imaged wholes. Whether he believes that some of this impressionistic impulse or mood carries over into the execution of art products or not, Browning does not say, but he does say that the art work, when completed, manifests the same impressionistic character, for it then becomes a “Chorus-ending from Euripides” itself, or some equally potent stimulus that flashes ever new impressions upon those who apprehend its own.²

B. Objectification.

The artists have also the special gift of self objectification, and thereby they seem always to put their own life out into external things.³ It is in these objectified moments that they get their flashes of the whole inner life of objects and persons. As artists they

1. Bishop Blougram, 351.

2. It should be clear from its context that Impressionism, as here used, has little if any of the modern connotation for the term. As defined by its context there can be no confusion of its application.

3. A Death in the Desert, 389, 390.

" Are fain invest
 The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,
 Availing it to purpose, to control,
 A need to blend with each external charm,
 Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,—
 In something not themselves: "1

And so each of them does to some extent. As artist,
 Browning himself declares that,

" By a special gift, and art of arts,
 More insight and more oversight and much more
 Will to use both of these than boast my mates,
 I can detach from me, commission forth
 Half of my soul!" 2

and that he can

" So project his surplusage of soul
 In search of body, so add self to self
 By owning what lay ownerless before,—
 So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms—
 (That) something dead may get to live again." 2

The objectification, then, occurs in connection with the apprehensions of the truths of art and with their imaging into the artistic conceptions. Because of the objectifications of the latter instance a part of the artist's own life becomes a permanent part of the art works themselves, even though the objectification process, as described for this case, did take place at the moment of artistic conception rather than at that of execution, for the execution merely reproduces in an external medium what was formerly fully conceived to just that end.

For successful art, then, there should be two stages to the objectification process, that wherein the truths of the natural and human worlds are apprehended by artists and that wherein selected and suggestive truths from among these are concentrated and imaged into fit shapes to repre-

1. *Sordello*, I-79.

2. *The Ring and the Book*, I-421.

sent the wholes from which they were first apprehended.¹ Painting from himself and to himself an Andrea del Sarto, for instance, fails of high art. His "Reach" should exceed his grasp" and has failed to do so for lack of the objectification process whereby the life of others and of things is first made a part of the artist and then a part of the art work he bodies forth.² The whole matter is well illustrated by Browning when he describes his own procedure in dramatic poetry, of which he says,—

"Lover, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem." ³

C. Inspiration.

Because the artist's self objectifications come only intermittently the whole art process has practically always been ascribed to inspiration of some description or other. Browning so regards it. "The more one sits and thinks over the creative process," he writes, "the more it confirms itself as inspiration, nothing more nor less."⁴ Because of the deep and mysterious intuitions of life apprehended in these intermittent moments the inspiration is often ascribed to forces outside the artist which beget and stimulate in him the creative mood and impulse. Of Browning's own practice Mrs. Browning writes, "Robert waits for an inclination, works by fits and starts; he can't do otherwise, he says, and his head is full of ideas which are to come out in clay or marble. I yearn for the poems, but he leaves that to me for the present."⁵ There is a double meaning in the words "he leaves that to me," for Mrs. Browning not only produced works during this time

1. Abt Vogler, 382; Pippa Passes, 130.

2. Andrea del Sarto, 346.

3. One Word More, XIV-363.

4. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-98.

5. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-346.

but she was also a constant inspiration to her husband whereby he stored many an idea to be used in his own later works, even though he was producing nothing at the moment.

In the above instance, then, we have an example of an inspiration from without, a very personal and intimate one in this case. There are many other like forces that inspire Browning himself or the artists represented or spoken of in his works. Love is regularly an inspiration whether its object be woman, man, nature, or God. A Plato, a Shelley, a Wordsworth, or a Wiseman may set the impulse going and even become a model for its creative representation. The impulse may sometimes be started from within at first,¹ but even here forces from without are soon at work with those from within. The attitude of the artist's watchers and of his critics, even, may become an inspiration.² Anything, the grotesque events of a hot day, a bird gathering its shred of nest-clothe, someone's death,³ may set the fancy at work. An old book, old times recalled, a picture,⁴

"A world of spirit as of sense
Made visible in verse" 5

a "Chorus-ending from Euripides," any of these are sufficient to start the spontaneous special faculties at play. Nature, man, and man's work, whether mechanical or creative, may strike a spark and give issue to an imaged whole fit to become an art work.

But however much forces of the above sort seem to come from without, they are really due to the objectification of the life that is within the artist himself.

"Incentives come from the soul's self;
"The rest avail not." 6

1. Sordello, II-85.

2. Andrea del Sarto, 346.

3. La Saisiaz, 858.

4. The Guardian Angel, 194.

5. Easter Day, XXVIII-334.

6. Andrea del Sarto, 347.

And the thing seen within is really the divine immanent there, so the artist really looks out through himself and on through the external world; he looks "Beyond the world for truth and beauty."¹ His inspiration, as well as the whole gift of which this is a part, is from and to God. Time, place, circumstance, object, and event are inspirations of the moment, each with its faint and momentary glimpse of the absolute and divine "Toward which the whole creation moves," and art creation most of all. In this sense the whole life work of the artist is inspired and is itself an inspiration.

In Browning, then, we find inspiration connected with the apprehensions of the truths which are the materials of art rather than with the execution of art products. It is connected with the flashes by which the intuited ideas are selected and concentrated into imaged wholes, more here than with the flashes by which the ideas come in the first place; but it is not connected with the routine and technical labor involved in the immediate embodiment of artistic conceptions into art mediums. The latter process is carried on by subordinate powers and has evidences of inspiration only because the art product appears in a form "Answering to and indicative of the informing spirit,"² a form which is, in origin, a part of the conception and not of the execution. In this separation of inspiration from the moment of art production and this connecting it somewhat with the moment of apprehension, but chiefly with the moment of artistic conception, in this Browning differs from most aestheticians and especially from the romantic ones whose theories just preceded his own.³ His theory at this point, as elsewhere, indicates his high valuation of the

1. Ferishtah's Fancies, XII-946.

2. Essay on Shelley, 1011.

3. Cf. Chapter I, Section 4, above.

spiritual content of art over its form, of the activities of the artist's own personality over the technical powers at his command, and of all manifestations of the growth and progress of the spirit over even the highest degree of technical perfection that art works may show.

D. Imagination.

The special faculty involved in the impressionistic, the objectifying, and the inspired moments of the artist, is the imagination. Of this faculty Pauline's lover is made to say,

" . . . Of my powers, one springs up to save
From utter death a soul with such desire
Confirmed to clay—of powers the only one
Which marks me—an imagination which
Has been a very angel, coming not
In fitful visions but beside me ever
And never failing me: so, though my mind
Forgets not, not a shred of life forgets,
Yet I can take a secret pride in calling
The dark past up to quell it regally." 1

This is the faculty whereby those first apprehensions of artistic truths are stored by the artist and the faculty which issues them forth again when the particular works are conceived, whether that be immediately or not until long afterward. It is a faculty that Browning regularly identifies with the fancy, and he usually finds it somewhat intermittent rather than constantly operative, as it is represented to be in the "Pauline" passage above quoted. It is present in all men to some extent, and is more intense in some than in others, and in these it is more intense at some times than at others.² It follows thought.³ It starts from, mixes with, and creeps back again to fact.⁴ In any

1. Pauline, 5. Compare to Gerard de Lairese, 971.

2. Paracelsus, IV-38.

3. Pauline, 10.

4. Christopher Smart, I-959.

case, it fuses fact with fancy in such a manner that the bare truths are reenlivened and are seen obliquely in their imaginative settings.¹ By its operation things otherwise missed or repudiated, and so either way unknown, get attention and appreciation. The imagination is, for Browning, what Milsand calls it, the faculty which "*En s'élevant plus haut, assez haut pour embrasser du regard l'universalité des choses, distingue et fait ressortir dans chaque objet un plan général qui s'accomplit par tout l'ensemble des choses.*"² In this light it is identical somewhat, too, with all the potentialities of the will whereby the artist is able to know and be all within his own inner consciousness.

E. Genius.

The whole gift or faculty of artists whereby they carry on the activities essential to artistic creation is known to Browning, as to aestheticians generally, as genius. He declares that he knows himself to have been aware of something more subtle than a ratiocinative process when the convictions of "genius" have thrilled him to the depths.³ Although he finds the faculty intermittent he does not admit it ever to be without recurrence, so he strikes out the lines of his first edition of "Time's Revenges" which say,

". . . All my genius, all my learning
Leave me where there's no returning." 4

For him it is a gift that involves impressionism, objectification, inspiration, and imagination all within itself. It does not necessarily inhere in artists alone, for a Paracelsus or a Grammarian may be a genius also. It has its recognition and development in men, in the fashion heretofore described as the method of recognition and develop-

1. *The Ring and the Book*, XII-601.

2. Milsand: *Robert Browning*, *Rev. des deux Mondes*, XI-663.

3. Quoted by Berdoo: *Browning Encyclopedia*, 382.

4. Wise: *Lit. Anec. of the Nineteenth Century*, Vol. I-544.

ment of all great personalities.¹ Its exercise by artists comprises their whole life, for their use of the apprehensions of genius, in artistic conception and in the execution of art works, employs the power of genius as the activities of other men, after the apprehensive process is done, do not,—even though the art execution phase may use but little of the gift. Such a man as Eglamor is

“ No genius rare
Transfiguring in fire or wave or air
At will, but a poor gnome that cloistered up
In some rock chamber with his agate cup,
His topaz rod, his seed pearl, in these few
And their arrangement finds enough to do
For his best art.”²

The faculty of genius is just that of knowing, feeling, and being all life within oneself. The genius may be above the crowd only so far as he includes the multitude within himself.³ His gift transfigures him.⁴ He has a special work to do which the men of talent, the conservers of society, may assist in but cannot do of themselves.⁵ His is a gift from and to God, a gift come by neither through heredity nor culture, for

“ The seed o' the apple tree
Brings forth another tree which bears a crab:
'Tis the great gardener grafts the excellence
Of wildings where he will.”⁶

Men of mere talent are often the would-be-artists and the hangers-on who walk with geniuses only to their annoyance, for they lack the sustaining and constantly inspired gift whereby genius makes out a lifetime of high endeavor, whether in art or in some other field.⁷

1. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. II-33 and 71.

2. Sordello, II-85.

3. Ibid., V-115.

4. In a Balcony, 370.

5. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, 695.

6. Ibid., 699.

7. A Soul's Tragedy, II-298.

4. Attitudes of the Artist: His Originality and Creativeness.

Due to the unexplainable and unteachable methods of art conception and art production and to the high and spontaneous gifts operative in these processes there has always been a tendency to regard the artist as a character aloof and superior to his works, greater than they, playing with the materials out of which he produces them, and a corresponding tendency to see in him the producer of works of originality, a worker whose products might, therefore, be called original creations. Aestheticians have regularly recognized these attitudes of and toward artists and these aspects of their work, and various theories have arisen to explain them. Among the various things that have become the subjects of well-defined theories in this field there are four, at least, upon which Browning has something to say worth noting. The artist's irony, his play, his originality, and his creative gift are more or less clearly explained in the poet's aesthetics, and his explanation of artistic creation is a distinct contribution toward clarifying this obscure subject of aesthetic inquiry.

A. The Ironic Attitude.

The romantic irony theory of Friedrich Schlegel, as explained in Chapter I of this study, shows the irony theory concerning the artist's attitude in its extreme form. It will be remembered that Schlegel's theory holds the world to be an expression of the self, in the sense that each of us unconsciously creates it out of his own imagination, and the theory further declares that the artist, especially, creates such a world of his imagination and then bodies it forth in the art work he produces. The theory states, further, that the art works and the worlds imaged in them, any or

all of these, are less than the artists themselves, since these things are all only creations of the artists' imaginations and they never express all of the self of the artists. Because of this the artists stand aloof, superior to the materials with which they build and to the products that issue from their hands, playing ironically with the materials that are subject to their wills and at works that can never be taken as fully representative of their creators. With the first part of this theory of irony Browning is clearly in accord, but with the second part,—with the notion that artists' works are an ironical play with their materials and that artists cannot be held accountable for their products because these products are never fully representative of their creators,—with this part of the theory Browning is not at all in agreement.

The artist is greater than any and all of his works, according to Browning, but this does not all relieve the artist of his responsibility to make these works as nearly all-expressive of his imaginative conception of the world as possible. The artist is greater than any or all of his works, yes, but in the sense that his life is necessarily greater than they and this because, as a specially gifted creature, he is able to apprehend more of the inner nature of the natural and human world than he is ever able to embody in art mediums.¹ In order to grow in life, in individual personality, his endeavor must ever be to increase his apprehensions in the directions indicated and to embody them ever more revealingly in artistic forms. Progress in apprehensive power and range, and progress in the revelational facilities of his art mediums must be the artist's care, and he needs trouble himself with technical perfection only so far as this is essential to the former

1. *Cleon*, 360; *One Word More*, 361; et. al.

ends. There is little irony in the artist's attitude who does this, and there can be little, however much he overtops his works, for he is under obligation to give the best embodiment possible for each new apprehension and to make even the art work itself, in each case, indicate that it is only an effort toward and never completely attains the revealment of the whole that is dealt with. Everywhere in great art one must feel just about to come to the end of all this pre-luding and about to come upon the great truth behind, and everywhere the artist must seem to say at the end of all said, "Plus Ultra! there is more beyond!" He is not justified in a Blougram's complacency because his works have been good enough for the occasion,¹ for this is to cheapen the God-given gift. It is an impossible attitude, in any case, for those who have the divine gift are "hunted to the end,"² by the aspirations inherent in the gift itself; they are inwardly forced to the position of Cleon, who speaks thus seriously and reverently of his high power,—

" Refer this to the gods
Whose gift alone it is! which, shall I dare
(All pride apart) upon the absurd pretext
That such a gift by chance lay in my hand,
Discourse of lightly or depreciate?
It might have fallen to another's hand: what then?
I pass too surely: let at least truth stay!"

3

The ironical attitude of the genius toward his fellowmen is represented as the particular error of many of Browning's characters and as exactly the error by which their earthly limitations bring them to earthly failure. It is thus that the Paracelsuses and the Sordellos fail to realize the high aims they persistently strive for, and it is only because they do constantly strive that their lives are not failures, though they have accomplished but little actual

1. Bishop Blougram, 358.

2. Paracelsus, III-32.

3. Cleon, 359

work in the world. A constant effort to transcend the visible in one's apprehensions and to suggest the transcendent by one's strivings as well as by the partial glimpses afforded in one's completed works, these efforts are obligations of the artist which make impossible any ironical attitude on his part toward the materials or the products of his creation.¹ These obligations, whatever his superiority to the materials of art and to past art works, still keep the artist humble in the face of the immensities he has not yet apprehended and of the many apprehensions within him still clamoring for expression in art. The ironical attitude, in fact, is one of self-sufficiency, a thing which is everywhere deprecated by Browning.² An attitude of weakness and insufficiency, on the contrary, is the thing everywhere commended by his theory, provided only that effort and aspiration be constant whereby to lessen the degree of these inescapable conditions of humanity. The artist must recognize his high gifts, to be sure, if he is to use them advantageously, but he must recognize also his weakness and imperfection else there is no place for progress.³ And these are essential qualities of the artist's attitude just as much if not more than of the attitude of less gifted men, for he above all others knows God's commission, how far short of it he falls, and that in its execution "All service ranks the same with God."⁴

But if Browning's theory opposes the last part of the romantic irony theory, his practice is frequently in open support of it. In a considerable number of his poems he stands aloof to exult in his powers and to sport with his materials and with the language mediums in which he em-

1. *The Return of the Druses*, III-206.

2. Cf. esp. *Mr. Sludge, the Medium*, 408.

3. *Fifine at the Fair*, CIX-729

4. *Pippa Passes*, 130.

bodies his truths. There are cases where the nature of the truth content justifies this because the truths involved seem to require embodiment in a manner that inherently suggests an ironical treatment on the author's part. This is true, for example, of "Mr. Sludge, the Medium," "Bishop Blougram's Apology," part of "A Soul's Tragedy," and of other works and parts of works where the sophistry and opportunism of the characters is a part, at least, of the truth to be represented. It is not true of the close of "Sordello," of "The Heretic's Tragedy," nor of most of the "Pacchiarotto" title poem. These and others their like indicate an ironical play on the part of their author which is without other justification, for the most part, than that a creative artist might show his agility and sport with his materials as he wished wherever confusion among his critics and awe among his readers seemed to serve his pleasure. Such is my evidence, then, when I contend that, whereas in his theory he usually supports the first part of the romantic irony theory and opposes the last part, in his practice Browning frequently supports the whole ironical attitude of the extreme romanticists such as Friedrich Schlegel.

B. The Play Attitude.

As contrasted to the above-described viewpoint, the whole artistic process may be considered a play of the artist, and this without any of the ironical attitude included. This was Schiller's notion in his play theory of art conception and production, wherein he explained art as the issue of a play impulse which is said to arise in man after the life impulse and form impulse provide for his necessities and insure their permanence.¹ By this play impulse, Schiller declares, the artist comes upon the freely chosen

1. Cf. Chapter I, Section 4, above.

form for the ideas of his conception, and this freely chosen form he then carries over into the moral life and applies in all his activities. Humanity rises, then, in proportion as its individuals increase in aesthetic culture, that is to say, in proportion as its individual members increasingly apply the play impulse.

Browning has no theory concerning play in art that at all corresponds to the one of Schiller just characterized. He cannot be said to have a play theory of art at all, though he does use the word play in connection with art activities and art works at times. He would include art activities, surely, when he says,

"If you choose to play! is my principle
Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be it what it will."¹

He applies the play idea to the operation of the imagination in one who lives in his inner consciousness the lives of other people. So Pippa declares, for example,

"This one day, I have leave to go,
And play out my fancy's fullest games."²

He refers to the creative process of nature as play, to life itself as a game, and to false love as a counterfeit play, an acting, like to the mimetic play of the stage.³ In the last of the references just given we come close to an application of the play idea to art itself. A direct reference occurs in "Fifine at the Fair" where it is said that nature's mimetic play brings no profit to purposed art, but here the play principle is repudiated.⁴ Somewhat in support of the principle, Bishop Blougram is made to say that he and Shakespeare play one game, with the only difference that Shakespeare's style of play is in contrast to his; and else-

1. *The Statue and the Bust*, 286.

2. *Pippa Passes*, 130.

3. *Two in the Compagna*, 89; *Aristophanes' Apology*, 649.

4. *Fifine at the Fair*, LII-713.

where Luria is said to play at his sketches of a new front for the Duomo, while Miranda's artistic efforts are called

" . . . Half-hour playings at Life's toil." ¹

In this there is no definite play theory concerning art, to be sure, but there is a recognition on Browning's part, certainly, of a serious play spirit in art as in life generally.

C. Originality.

The case of originality stands much the same as that of play in Browning's aesthetics. One could indulge criticism of his works at some length to show his originality in practice, but he has very little theory concerning the nature of originality in artists' works. He protests constantly against the common and the conventional, however, in life as well as in art, and he everywhere urges obedience to individual impulses,² both of which would tend toward originality if observed by artists. There are, moreover, several references to originality that do actually indicate a somewhat vaguely defined theory on the subject. Jules, for example, declares that he has worked out other men's ideals in his art and that in his perfection along this line he senses an ultimate failure, for his unconscious hand inevitably turns to the ancient types however palpably the novel ones appear to his spirit. He sees only one way of escape, namely, that of working in a different art, in painting instead of in sculpture, for example, whereby the conventions will be escaped because of the strange medium.³ Again, Aristophanes is made to claim inventiveness for his art and to think that in it he emulates

" That originaive force
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,

1. Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, II-754.

2. Cf. e. g., The Statue and the Bust, 283 ff.

3. Pippa Passes IV-142.

Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones,
Phales Iacchos." 1

In the last reference cited above the originality referred to seems to be identical with creativeness rather than with mere unconventionality or novelty, as in the former references. In "Fifine at the Fair" there is something of both these aspects, in the passage referring to music and closing with the assertion that

" The precious means the rare
And not the absolute in all good save surprise." 2

The passage attempts to show that soul-food, what furnishes thought and feeling, remains constant throughout the ages and that the changes can come only in the way of new forms and new guises that successively reveal new sides of the old content. This is a unique touch, for it makes originality consist in the devising of new forms that are increasingly transparent, or at least able, somehow, to increasingly reveal more and more the unknown aspects of a truth content which in itself remains constant for the use of art. This idea is quite in accord with the progress theory of the poet, as applied to art, and is seen more directly connected with that theory in a "Christopher Smart" passage where the commonplace, the golden mean, the fit, the right, and the complete are protested in favor of the breaking of rules, the incomplete, the new, and the novel,—the latter to be attained by constant advance on what was and is and constant glimpses of what may be in art, whereby art itself becomes a symbol of life, a symbol of the progressive existence of a single spirit essence in many changing forms.³

So far as there is a theory of originality in Browning's

1. Aristophanes' Apology, 649

2. *Fifine at the Fair*, XCII-725.

3. *Christopher Smart*, IV-959.

aesthetics, then, this theory seems to declare that the thought and spirit content for art, as a whole, is constant and universal, and that art's effort is merely to open up new ways to liberate and make manifest yet unseen parts and aspects of the concealed whole. The spirit life of individuals is unique and peculiar to each personality and due to this fact the individual conceptions of the universal truths will always be original, where the great artist is at work, because new and more revealing forms have been conceived in which to embody the apprehensions of the artist. And these apprehensions are larger, too, because of greater conquests of the natural and human forms by the artist's high power for apprehension. Because of the new forms, the new guises, we recognize the works as original and ever new aspects of an universal and eternal whole flash upon us ever new visions of something that, in itself, because of the new aspects, seems forever new. By the originality of the artist which devises variations in art mediums for the manifestation of ever varying aspects of the constant and universal essence, by this it is that old flesh and form walls seem suddenly candled through and the seeing and revealing spirit of the artist brings us forever into what seems to us the presence of new truth.

D. Creativeness of Artists.

Most aestheticians refer to artists as creators and to their works as creations, but few of them explain how and in what sense their terms are apposite. Browning's theory, whether agreed with or not, is a significant one for the very reason that it does make quite clear just what the poet means by creation in art. As a process creation is connected, in his theory, with the second step in the whole procedure of the artist, the step in which the ideas or

truths of art apprehended in the first step of the process are selected from, concentrated, and imaged all at once in fit forms for their bodying forth. It is separated more or less, as we shall see, from the intuitional and spiritual process of apprehending the truths of art in the natural and human world, which is the business of all individual personalities whether artists or not, and from the actual building of the creative images into art products, which is a technical and subordinate task of the artists only. The making of the living image out of the ideas or truths intuitively apprehended throughout nature and humanity is the creation of Browning's definition, and the art product is a creation in its representation of this image and not in its mere executorial process.

It is the creative side of the imaginative faculty that is intermittent, rather than the apprehending one, and it is this side that yields least to study and practice,¹ for this is the particular divine endowment of the artist alone. This is the process wherein

" . . . Is the finger of God, a flash of the will that can,
Existent behind all laws, that made them and, lo, they are!"²

and the work of the process is analogous to that of God, the

,"Builder and maker . . . of houses not made with hands!"

The exclusiveness of the artist's gift and the concentrative and suggestive phases of his creation are also indicated by Abt Vogler when he goes on to say,

"And I know not if, save in this, such gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star."

Further, the artist is a "fashioner,"³ and the thing he fashions, when executed in art, becomes a substantive

1. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-72 and 98.

2. Abt Vogler, 383.

3. Essay on Shelley, 1009.

thing projected from himself and has the magic qualities of immediateness and communicability. The artist is, therefore, a

" . . . Mage, like him of Halberstadt,
John, who made things Boehme wrote thoughts about—
He, with a 'look you!' vents a brace of rhymes,
And in there breaks the sudden rose herself." 1

His building is not merely a mechanical creation, for there are in it those

" . . . Who walked in the glare and glow,
Presences plain in the place; or, fresh from the Protoplast." 2

In it external things are made, or made over, and the artist himself is recreated in his works,—

"What never had been, was now; what was, as it shall be anon:
And what is,—shall I say, matched both? for I was made perfect too."

From another standpoint the artist's creations are representations of the sort of beings he would emulate and that he would have others emulate. He creates within his works a band of sympathizers,³ of creatures in accord with his ideals and with the ideals of other men, so, to some extent at least, he is even the creator of a taste for his works. Something of all this, at any rate, is implied by Balaustion when she asks,

"What's poetry except a power that makes?
And speaking to one sense, inspires the rest,
Pressing them all into its service; so
That who sees painting, seems to hear as well
The speech that's proper for the painted mouth;
And who hears music, feels his solitude
Peopled at once—for how count heartbeats plain
Unless a company, with hearts which beat,
Come close to the musician, seen or no?" 4

Finally, the making power of artists, in the final analysis, aspires, through the created images, to represent the

1. Transcendentalism, 336.

2. Abt Vogler, 382.

3. Sordello, I-81.

4. Balaustion's Adventure, 605.

inner truths of the natural and human worlds; and the creations themselves seem ever to aspire to be new visions of the divine essence which is glimpsed in the life that artists everywhere have apprehended. In their works the creating artists

" Are fain invest
The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,
Availing it to purpose, to control,
To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy
And separate interests that may employ
That beauty fitly, for its proper sake." 1

And they do not stop here, for

" Fresh births of beauty wake
Fresh homage, every grade of love is past,
With every mode of loveliness: then cast
Inferior idols off their borrowed crown
Before a coming glory. Up and down
Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
To throb the secret forth; a touch divine
Visibly through His garden walketh God." 1

There is still another sense than those mentioned above in which the artist may be thought of as a creator. It seems at times art reaches perfection in certain forms and so the need of new forms arises. Browning's practice recognizes this more clearly than his theory, perhaps, and this accounts for his varied and almost exclusive use of the dramatic monologue as a poetic medium. What little theory he has on this point indicates that, to some extent at least, the whole creative feature of art might be considered a matter of form, in the sense that art workers must constantly evolve more transparent mediums whereby new and previously unrevealed aspects and vistas of the universal and absolute truths may be had. He rates early Italian painting above Greek art on the ground that the latter stands perfect while the former makes and indicates pro-

gress by its use of faulty forms which thereby allow more of soul to shine through than the perfect forms of Greek art are able to do.¹ Again, in "Fifine at the Fair" Schumann's "Carnival" is referred to as a work of art that contains old themes in a new dress.² The matter seems not altogether clear in Browning's own mind, however, for the cited passage also says,

"The forms, the themes—no one without its counterpart
Ages ago; no one, but mumbled the due time
I' the mouth of the eater, needs to be cooked again—"

Both form and truth content, then, are only parts and need to grow, keeping in constant adequacy to one another so that, as the "Essay on Shelley" has it, the new and enlarged parts of the one whole truth may appear in new and more transparent mediums, mediums "Closely answering to and indicative of the process of the informing spirit."³ These are hints, the "Fifine" and the "Essay on Shelley" passages, however vaguely they put it and however alone they stand in Browning's works, of a theory that would extend the creative progress of art to both form and content. This theory otherwise says merely that the process is a creative one in its constant revelations of new aspects and phases of the whole and absolute truths.

In the "Essay on Shelley," again, there is a distinction drawn between the creative process of the objective poet and that of the subjective one. The objective poet, it is said, "Is properly the fashioner," and the subjective one "Is rather a seer . . . than a fashioner." The explanation, however, makes clear that these statements are intended only in the sense that the objective poet reproduces external things for "The common eye and apprehension of his fellow-men," while the subjec-

1. *Old Pictures in Florence*, 177.

2. *Fifine at the Fair*, XCII-725.

3. *Essay on Shelley*, 1011.

tive one seeks to embody "Not what man sees, but what God sees, — the *Ideas* of Plato," the things within his own soul which are "The nearest reflex of that absolute Mind, according to the intuitions of which he desires to perceive and speak." The works of both are creative, nevertheless, for those of the objective poet bring new phenomena and those of the subjective poet bring new and deeper significance from the phenomena previously known. The two sorts of creative artists appear as alternating complimentary creators, both essential to an artistic revelation of ever new phases of people and things and ever new and deeper meanings in these phases. A perfect combination of the two in a single artist would be the ideal condition for creative work, but is a consummation such as the art world had not yet seen up to Browning's time. It is needless to add that in himself and in his works the poet constantly aspired to harbor and make manifest just this combination.¹

Finally, the more exact nature of what the creation of artists actually consists in must be noted. We have already seen how the artist objectifies himself into nature and into other men and so finds the life "out there" which he then represents in his art works. In these works he creates only in the sense of reanimating what seems inanimate, or in the sense of giving a higher degree of being to what seems lower in the scale. All worth lies in the seeing soul of the artist, here, and this soul and its world gain by those creative efforts whereby it "sees alive" all things and so gains fellowship of spirit where there seemed nothing to fellow with before. So the Eidothee statue, for

1. Cf. *Sordello*, III-98, and *One Word More*, 363.

example, "Comes alive," and "Is a creation for the nonce" out of ugliness and death that will, in its turn, again be a challenge to the "Soul that sees."¹

The single passage from "The Ring and the Book" which explains how artistic creation is a reanimating process and which at once connects it, also, with the principles of personality and progress in Browning's aesthetics is inclusive and conclusive enough to close fittingly our study of his theories concerning the artist. At any rate he here explains in his own words the progressive creational work of the artistic personality, and in a way that lights up the whole art process. I quote:

"Man,—as befits the made, the inferior thing,—
 Purposed, since made, to grow, not make in turn,
 Yet forced to try and make, else fail to grow,
 Formed to rise, reach at, if not grasp and gain
 The good beyond him,—which attempt is growth,—
 Repeats God's process in man's due degree,
 Attaining man's proportionate result—
 Creates, no, but resuscitates, perhaps.
 Inalienable, the arch-prerogative
 Which turns thought, act—conceives, expresses too!
 No less, man, bounded, yearning to be free,
 May so project his surplusage of soul
 In search of body, so add self to self
 By owning what lay ownerless before,—
 So find, so fill full, so appropriate forms—
 That, although nothing which had never life
 Shall get life from him, be, not having been,
 Yet something dead may get to live again,
 Something with too much life or no enough,
 Which, either way imperfect, ended once:
 An end whereat man's impulse intervenes,
 Makes new beginning, starts the dead alive,
 Completes the incomplete and saves the thing." 2

Here practically all of the poet's theories concerning the nature, gifts, and methods of artists are gathered up and

1. *Fine at the Fair*, LV-714 ff.

2. *The Ring and the Book*, I-421.

summarized in a single passage. Here, too, is the central principle of all his aesthetics, seen in its connection with several of its chief subordinates. And here already there are glimpses of his theories concerning the nature of the work of art, a phase of his aesthetics to which we must now turn.

CHAPTER V.

THEORIES CONCERNING THE WORK OF ART.

Content and form problems are the chief concern of that part of any aesthetics which attempts to explain art works in themselves, viewed as nearly as possible and for the moment as products distinct from and unconnected with their producers and appreciators. Besides the contents and forms, the purposes of art, too, have frequently been regarded as effects and ends that seem to lie within the art works themselves rather than in producers or appreciators, and have, therefore, been often discussed in the sections of aesthetic studies given to the investigation of art works as independent objects. Lastly, and more regularly than the purposes of art, because less separable from this allocation, the classifications of art have been almost uniformly dealt with in those parts of aesthetic studies given to the consideration of the works of art *per se*.

With the precedents above-mentioned to follow it is to be expected that the present chapter has for its aim the investigation of Browning's theories concerning the materials, methods, purposes, and classifications of art works. The scheme by which these four matters are brought together under the chapter head here employed seems all the more logical, too, when it is remembered that Browning regards the art work as a product made up of truths that are mediated by sensuous embodiments such as are, or should be, made constantly more inconspicuous and so more revelational of the truth contents. The materials and

methods of art works are here directly involved, and both the purposes and classifications of art in Browning's aesthetics are then conditioned upon the materials and the methods employed, to some extent at least. So far as these things are true they are justifications, at any rate, for the scheme of the present chapter.

1. General Characteristics of Art Works.

Before taking up in detail the particular theories apposite to the four matters above specified there are certain general characteristics of art works pointed out by Browning that deserve to be noted. In the first place, art works are given an autonomy in their own right, such, for example, as Aprile describes when he says,

" His sprites created,
God grants to each a sphere to be its world,

So I create a world for these my shapes
Fit to sustain their beauty and their strength!" 1

Likewise Norbert is made to point out how each work of nature is measured by itself and how each work of art seems to stand abrupt, distinct, as

"God's approval on his universe!" 2

In the work of art, Browning declares, natural and human life is caught up in its moments of highest and most vivid existence, given externalisation into another and artficed medium, with hints of its fore and after moments, too, but with a distinct art sphere in which to live independently of its natural life.³

Moreover, in addition to an autonomy of its own for the life represented, the art work also gives permanence to that life in an appropriate, lasting embodiment. The life that

1. Pararelsus, II-23.

2. In a Balcony, 366.

3. Easter Day, XXV-333.

has passed and is now artistically reanimated, and the life that is changing and will pass, these art catches and fixes, "A beauty never to fade,"¹ in its permanent forms. Through art the unborn generations attain their due from the life of the present.² Thus the uses and purposes and high ends of all life survive and are brought to man's attention in art.³ There is a transference into the works of art of all that has been achieved by dead things and of all that is being achieved by things that will die. Accordingly, in the permanent forms of art there is a restoring and perpetuating of all life against the accidents of time.⁴ Even the feelings, otherwise so fleeting, art catches and gives fixed and lasting existence. It is the effort of all the arts, indeed,

" To match and mate
Feeling with knowledge,—make as manifest
Soul's work as Mind's work, turbulence as rest,
Hates, loves, joys, woes, hopes, fears . . . " 5

There are phases of art, nevertheless, in which it also, and the life it represents, may be viewed as transient and and passing,—and necessarily so, else there were no possibility of progress in art, according to our poet. An Abt Vogler's improvised music, for instance, is entirely evanescent, except that its beautiful conceptions, he assures us, are not without their permanence for an after life, though they cannot realize an abiding existence on earth. So too, the Greek art works "Stand for our copy" until all they have to teach us is gotten and then "We shall see them abolished."⁶ Just here lies the good of the evanescence of art, in Browning's opinion, for if any particu-

1. *The Statue and the Bust*, 283.

2. *Saul*, XIII-182.

3. *James Lee's Wife*, VIII-376.

4. *Fifine at the Fair*, LII-713.

5. *Charles Avison*, VII-976.

6. *Old Pictures in Florence*, 176.

lar art works or styles in art continued always to be the ideal ones there would be no increased revelation of the inner life of feeling and spirit and so no imaged progress such as art must manifest if it is to be a true image of life as progressive.¹

Art works may be thought of as transient also in the sense that their effects are immediate and momentary, that is, the life in them is apprehended only intermittently in intuitive and impressionistic flashes. They not only contain but are "Incidents in the development of a soul,"² or "A sunset touch, some one's death, a Chorus-ending from Euripides."³ They are made up only of suggestive part truths concentrated into imperfect syntheses that afford only flashes of the wholes they would fain represent. Yet, in their momentary flashes of truth, eternal truth itself seems achieved, for here time, place, and causality seem suddenly to have vanished and all else is wiped out of consciousness save a spiritual experience with an object such that both the experience and the object appear all at once to be at one, eternal, and unbounded.⁴ And though this flash passes, something of its effect is forever after existent in the individual soul that has experienced it. So a Pippa's song, any art work once experienced, lives on permanently among the truths that constitute man's conception of his universe and its life.

The art work, then, Browning would say, catches up and fixes firm and fast in its mediums the truths that comprise its content, but it makes these accessible only to "The soul that sees," and to this soul only in its intermittent moments of intuitive vision. In the art work the truths.

1. *Easter Day*, XXVIII-334.

2. *Dedication to Sordello*, 74.

3. *Bishop Blougram*, 351.

4. *By the Fireside*, 186.

images of the life of spirit in form, are caught up and rendered permanently accessible for as long as marble and canvass last, and beyond that they remain still accessible in the minds of men and, finally, they are partially realized conceptions of an hour here and now that become a part of the absolute, fully-realized whole in the hereafter. In these ways art works are at once transient and permanent evanescent and abiding; in them "All's change, but permanence as well."¹

2. The Materials of Art.

The materials of life described in Browning's philosophy are the materials of art described in his aesthetics, except that some of all the materials of life are combined and concentrated in each of the materials of art. As knowledge or truth, power, and love are the things whereof all our apprehensions and conceptions of anything come and are comprised, so these materials are selected from and concentrated into suggestive wholes such as constitute artistic conceptions ready for execution into art products. Since something of all the materials of life is thus combined in each and every material of art a general term to designate art materials is required, in view of which Browning usually refers to these materials as *truths*, though he sometimes calls them *meanings* and occasionally speaks of them as *ideas*, in the Platonic sense, as did the romantic aestheticians who preceded him.²

A. The Primary Elements.

The truths, meanings, or ideas of art, as materials of life in artistic concentrations, Browning finds made up, necessarily, of the primary elements of experience, that is, of the

1. *Fifine at the Fair*, CXXIV-733.

2. Cf. Chapter I, Section 5, above.

apprehensions of the nature and life of things that come through the empirical and intuitive channels and constitute the whole store of ideas anyone has concerning the universe and its life. The primary elements of art, then, are sensations, emotions, images, and concepts, and it is out of these raw materials that the truths, meanings, or ideas concerning the world and its life are built and made ready for the suggestive and selective concentrations which comprise artistic conceptions. Though they are suggestive concentrations, then, these artistic conceptions have still for their content the truths of life and its world which are made up of the primary elements of experience. The suggestive concentrations themselves must, therefore contain elements from and that appeal to all four of man's primary experiences whereby, at once, to report of and to life as a whole.

B. Truths, Ideas, or Meanings.

The sensations, passions, images, and thoughts of the artist's first experience of the truths of his artistic conceptions are all in his work, save only that

"Perceptions whole like that he sought
To clothe"¹

cannot entirely be gotten into the rigid mediums of art. It is, as Bishop Blougram puts it,

" . . . The idea, the feeling and the love
God means mankind should strive for and show forth
Whatever be the process to that end, "²

Everywhere in his works the poet insists that thoughts, images, and sensations are present in art works, but he everywhere insists, too, that these things are there all gathered up into "perceptions whole," into concentrated ideas or truths for the better apprehension of all whose intuitions

1. *Sordello*, II-89.

2. Bishop Blougram, 355.

issue from the experience of art. Everywhere, he declares, the artist has

"Distinguished his and God's part: whence
A world of spirit as of sense
Was plain to him, " 1

And art not only uses but is even a vindication of sense, as against pure thought or pure spirit.² In it all the elements of experience are combined. In it there is no place for pure sensations, pure images, pure feelings, nor pure concepts alone.³ Even when it starts from one of these, from concepts, as Browning frequently says, it cannot stop there but must throw this element back into all its original connections with the others so that the resultant conception will be a whole for man's whole being.

Because man's ideas concerning the universe and its life are in a state of continual growth, due to continual additions from empirical and intuitive experiences, and because of the rigidity and limitations of art mediums, too, the ideas of art are always too large for complete expression in any art work. So there always seems to be a fringe, a projection, a meaning beyond that actually set forth, and this sort of thing Browning finds essential to high art. A Lippo Lippi is concerned to paint things as they are, yes, but he would beat nature, too, and flash forth better than she can do the meaning of the world and life in it. The sounds of the musician must carry ideas too large for actual and exact formulation, too large for definite expression in sounds. So an idea of the life of Venice is called up by Galuppi's "Toccata" or Schumann's "Carnival,"⁴ and these have hints, they seem to give vague images and to be symbols, of all the world and its life.

1. *Easter Day*, XXVIII-334.

2. *Prologue to Ferishtah's Fancies*, 929.

3. *Luria*, V-315; *Transcendentalism*, 335.

4. *Fifine at the Fair*, XCI-725.

The truths or ideas of art, then, are not mere concepts of the intellect such as one can take a stand on and rest there. They are "Profusion of imagery covering the depth of thought."¹ They are concepts shot through with passion, colored again with the shades and tones of sensation, all shaped and figured with imagery, the whole concentrated into one whole symbol or image that shall represent as nearly as possible the whole life of the object to which these things appertain. Each such idea or truth, in itself, gives only a part, yet a relative part, of the thing it would image, and, being a selected, suggestive part from among many such, it has many sides and suggestions that hint of the larger whole of which it can be only a fragmentary and partial representation.

The truths or ideas of art are, indeed, expanded concepts concerning the world and its fulness.² They are ideas as to the minutiae of objects and lives about us raised into the universal by "Imagination's limitless domain."³ They are relative parts so breathed into by the spirit, which is universal, that they somehow flash vistas, not of their own wholes alone, but of the nature and meaning of all the universe and all life, vistas centered and concentrated here in a flash that defies time and space and causality with its direct hint of the absolute and eternal. Quite commonplace facts, indeed, can be so used in art that they carry worlds of meaning beyond the facts. So a Browning, as artist, may confess,

"I took one thought his picture struck from me,
And spread it out, translating it to song." 4

So everywhere in art naked thoughts are draped in sights

1. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-287.

2. Pietro, 900.

3. Gerard de Lairese, II-971.

4. The Guardian Angel, 195.

and sounds, fringed with meanings until they come to stand for the whole

“ Secret of the world,
Of man, and man's true purpose, path and fate.”¹

For, to repeat, such is the expansive, growing, and overflowing nature of the truths of art that they are never capable of entire embodiment in the mediums of artistic representations.

C. The Sublime and the Beautiful.

The sublime and the beautiful are not very clearly differentiated in Browning's works, nor are they specifically pointed out as ideas or truths of separate and distinct qualities. The terms seem quite frequently to be used interchangeably, too, and *beauty*, or *the beautiful*, is often used in a sense that indicates the inclusion also of what is elsewhere called the sublime. In spite of all this, however, there is sufficient evidence to indicate that a distinction between the sublime and the beautiful existed in Browning's mind, that he looked upon these two as kinds or qualities of ideas, and that his theories concerning them, so far as they went, were in close agreement with those of the previous modern aestheticians.

In the first place, he finds both beauty and sublimity in nature and man as well as in art, and makes the distinction between the two a distinction of the mind that apprehends them rather than of the objects observed,—or more accurately, perhaps, he connects the beautiful largely with the formal aspect of things and so with appeals to the senses from outside, and the sublime he preferably connects with the content side of things and so with appeals to the mind and spirit from within.²

1. Paracelsus, I-15.

2. Cf. Childe Roland, 288. The Return of the Druses, II-204.

The check and hush and awe, followed by high satisfactions, which are the experiences quite regularly spoken of by Browning in connection with the intuitive flashes of art truths, seem to be accurate descriptions of what are uniformly understood to be experiences of the sublime. He also calls the increased apprehension of such truths a sublimation of the mind,¹ and he refers to the process of art whereby soul is thrust into matter as a sublimation of matter.² His dying characters and those in the presence of visions otherwise have experiences such as we regularly ascribe to the sublime. But whether in the presence of visions, great passions, animating facts, Abt Vogler's improvising, a Chorus-ending from Euripides, or whatnot, the experiences of the kind under discussion are, for Browning, the experiences of ideas or truths such as artists employ in their art products, and they come chiefly from man or from artistic representations by and of and for man,³ rather than from representations of natural objects. Where sublimity is found in nature it is ascribed to the characteristics of the spiritual ideas aroused rather than to the external grandeur or power of the objects observed.⁴ The Kantian differentiation of the static and the dynamic sublime, where the static manifests great size and grandeur and the dynamic vast activity and power, though not categorically made, is still present, then, in Browning's aesthetics, and is directly related to the nature of the ideas or truths involved rather than to the nature of the objects in observation.⁵

Power and love are connected by the poet as things apprehended chiefly in the absolute, and beauty and the good are likewise connected as things apprehended chiefly in the con-

1. *Sordello*, V-115.

2. *Ibid.*, VI-124.

3. *Christmas Eve*, XIV-322.

4. *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, IV-771.

5. Cf. *Dhruva*: Kant and Browning, 28.

crete.¹ Beauty is thus made a special quality of ideas, then, where the evil and the ugly are in evidence as limitations upon the spirit content, or where the form side of the thing observed is paramount in attention.² It is thus connected with the fixed medium rather than with the growing and imperfect essence that is mediated. Beauty is the weak, the dim, the delicate, the pleasure-giving, as contrasted to the strong, the brilliant, the large, and the awe-inspiring.³ It tends, because of its association with form, to be more nearly identified with the object of art than does the sublime. The objectification of the idea in the case of the beautiful is from the artist into the object; in the case of the sublime it is from the artist through the object toward God, and there is no exact point at which the image can be sensibly limned as in the case of the beautiful.⁴

A few significant passages may serve to indicate the differentiations above pointed out. In "Christmas Eve" the worshippers at Rome are seen as

"All with breasts that beat for beauty,
Whether sublimed to the surprise of them,
In noble daring, steadfast duty,
The heroes in passion, or in action,—
Or, lowered for sense's satisfaction
To the mere outside of human creatures,
Mere perfect form and faultless features." 5

Of a Rafael picture the poet declares,

"Never to whom knelt votarist in shrine
By nature's beauty helped, by art's divine
More varied—beauty with magnificence—
Than this: 'from floor to roof one evidence
Of how far earth may rival heaven.'" 6

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1. Essay on Shelley, 1014.
 2. La Saisiaz 855.
 3. The Ring and the Book, IX-542.
 4. Paracelsus, V-48.
 5. Christmas Eve, XI-322.
 6. Christopher Smart, III-959.

And then in "Gerard de Laireesse" he tells his silent interlocutor that in art fancy, the imagination, has

" Composed the strife
Twixt sense and soul: for sense, my De Laireesse
Cannot content itself with outward things,
Mere beauty: soul must needs know whence there
Springs—How, when and why—what sense but loves, nor lists
To know at all." 1

The distinction made between the sublime and the beautiful is clear in the lines here quoted and the list of passages could be considerably extended to further clarification of the matter, no doubt, but enough have been given and enough comment indulged to indicate the general lines of the differentiation in Browning's aesthetics.

Finally, from what we have seen of the poet's theory of beauty and sublimity we must conclude that he does not take these things to be ideas or truths in themselves, but rather believes that ideas or truths have both sublime and beautiful aspects and that, although these two aspects are not altogether separable in any idea or truth usable in art, there is a tendency to make and find one or the other paramount in any and all art works. But besides these two aspects of ideas or truths there is another, one somewhat contrasted to the beautiful and so related to some extent with the sublime, an aspect of ideas or truths which plays a very large part in Browning's philosophy and is carried over to a like significance in his aesthetics, though less is said of it in this sphere. I refer to the evil, looked upon as an aspect of ideas and usable in art as such, and shall now conclude the survey of the poet's theories on the materials of art with a brief account of his notions concerning the nature and place of the evil in art works.

1. Gerard de Laireesse, V-971.

D. The Evil and the Ugly.¹

It will be remembered that, for Browning, due to limiting and concealing forms, the evil is an original and inherent antagonistic element in all things, and that this element partially manifests itself as a partiality or limitation of spirit imposed by the cramping and obscuring forms in which spirit has its earthly manifestations. The very relativity of the materials of life, their falling short of the absolute, is due just to the limited and partial nature imposed upon them by the forms in which alone they can be apprehended. It will be remembered, too, that these materials of life are just the things which become the materials of art, as Browning explains the matter, consequently the ideas or truths of art are always limited and partial, on the one hand, even while they aspire and reach, from another standpoint, toward a whole beyond themselves. Art may, to be sure, represent things only from the standpoint of what they seem to aspire to be, but its true function is to image as nearly as possible life's process as a whole and to do this it must necessarily show spirit struggling with and gradually triumphing over matter, a task possible to art only so far as it bodies forth its ideas or truths themselves in such mediums and in such a way that they seem at once limited by and yet triumphing over or escaping from their form mediums. The highest art, according to Browning, always does manifest this escaping from form limitations, and so, in consequence, the highest art must necessarily employ the evil, in the sense here indicated, for its representations of life.

It is readily understood from the foregoing that the evil

1. Cf. above—Chapters I, Section 5B; II-60 ff; and III-78 ff. Read also—Dhruva: Kant and Browning, 28; Serrazin: *La renaissance de la poesie anglaise*, 225; and Campbell: *The Grottesque in the Poetry of Robert Browning*, 13 ff.

includes the whole group of negatives or antagonists that seem to come from form limitations,—such, for example, as ugliness, discord, doubt, the grotesque, et cetera,—and that these may all properly be regarded as evils from the standpoint of the growth of the spirit. In the field of art most of these same antagonistic elements appear, and here again they appear as limitations of the spirit, since they have the appearance of always cramping or concealing the truths of art by their ever inadequate mediums, as above explained. There is no occasion for discussing here the views of Browning with respect to all these subordinate phases of the evil in art, but since the ugly is an especially significant matter in aesthetics generally, because of its position as the antithesis of the beautiful, we may well note briefly a few of his notions concerning its nature and use.

In aesthetics generally the ugly is regarded as having close affinities with the sublime, the humorous, and the grotesque, but in Browning there is scarcely anything that can be called theory on these matters. He does recognize the grotesqueness of character in Caliban¹ and the Professor at Göttingen,² however, and his practice illustrates clearly all these relations and phases of the ugly. His theory at this point seems to extend only to the declaration that the ugly and the beautiful occur in combination whereby the ugly itself seems beautiful,³ and to a rather vague differentiation at times between ugliness of form and ugliness of spirit or character.⁴ As to its function in art, he would say that ugliness itself, here as everywhere in the world, is just to act as

“ . . . A foil
For a new birth of life, the challenged soul's response
To ugliness and death,—creation for the nonce.”⁵

1. *Letters of Browning*, ed. by Wise, Vol. II-32.

2. *Christmas Eve*, XIV-322.

3. *Sordello*, VI-124.

4. *Paracelsus*, II-23; *Sordello*, III-99.

5. *Fifine at the Fair*, LV-714.

For the sake of brevity, however, we class ugliness, discord, and all the negative phases of ideas and truths manifested in art under the head of evil, as Browning himself often does. So doing we may, perhaps, get at his notions concerning the general nature and function of all such elements when used in art works. From this standpoint we may note first that perfection in art forms is considered objectionable just on the ground that it conceals the ideas or truths intended to be revealed by it. A certain lady, for instance, is described as having a statue's sleepy grace and it is said of her that

“ . . . Her fault
Was just perfection: for suppose
Only the little flaw, and I had peeped
Inside it, learned what soul inside was like.” 1

Evidently the statue stood in the same case as the lady and whereas a perfect form obscured the soul, the meaning, of the statue, an imperfection in its form would have been the very means of revealing this soul or meaning. Such is the whole tenor of “*Andrea del Sarto*” and of many other poems and passages in Browning's works. But this is not to be taken as justifying the artist in falsifying the natural forms in which human and natural life occur with an eye thus better to represent and interpret life, for to distort their natural forms is to falsify also the nature and meanings of these lives themselves.

“A fine way to paint soul, by painting body
So ill, the eye can't stop there, must go further
And can't fare worse!” 2

says Fra Lippo Lippi, and seems here to have become Browning's own spokesman. What he insists upon, of course, is the painting of things as they are, a representation of the human spirit in its actual flesh habitation with-

1. *The Inn Album*, II-779.

2. *Fra Lippo Lippi*, 344.

out artificial distortion for symbolic ends. What he wants is a use of evil as it actually occurs, not a falsified evil. On the other hand, he would say that the exclusion of the evil, of flaws in forms, from the artistic representation of objects, persons, or situations in which it actually always occurs in some degree or other, is equally a distortion of the truths to be represented.

"Divergency from type was earth's effect."¹

and a representation of this, whereby to represent the actual state of spirit in form, working its way toward freedom from a "stubborn" embodiment which it can never altogether escape,—this is the end of art, and to this end the use of evil in the form of mediums imperfectly adequate to the ideas to be represented is inescapable.

The evil in life is, for Browning, a constantly changing temporary restraint upon spirit which is a means toward permanent good hereafter, and the evil in art must appear as the same sort of thing. The evil act and evil character, the discordant sound, the warped forms of objects represented in art, all these are caught from the outer and inner life and are seen, so Browning says in his practice as well as his theory, as representations of "The universe, nature and man, in their actual state of perfection in imperfection."² Everywhere his characters are divided personalities, half-men, mixtures of good and evil,³ but with the good always on the way toward a triumph over the evil so long as the genuine life process is exercised. Everywhere in his theory he declares that this mixture of good and evil must exist in art and in such a fashion that the good, which is here the truths or ideas representing life, is seen in the process of surmounting the evil, which is here the limitation on spirit

1. Aristophanes' *Apology*, 640.

2. *Essay on Shelley*, 1010.

3. Cf. *Miss West: Browning's Villains*, B. S. P., Vol. I-417.

due to form. And just because art is a representation of the sort here described, it is at once a representation and interpretation of life as it is.¹ Whether the evil be the discords of music; the pain, suffering, and wrong of characters in literary art; or yet some other represented limitation upon spirit and truth, the general nature and end of the representations are always the same.

"All great works in this world spring from the ruins
Of greater projects—ever, on this earth,
Babels men block out, Babylons they build." 2

And just to visualize life as it is, the better to understand how life is a progress by trial and error, a triumph by failure and defeat, just for this men set up representations of life in art within which the evil in some form or other forever appears as the losing antagonist.

In conclusion it must be said, however, that the use of evil in art, whether as ugliness, discord, or some other antagonistic force in representation, is not for Browning as for some aestheticians a means to the end of representing life as altogether evil and so to be repudiated on earth. Its use is not to the end of showing the universe and its life as

" . . . Only a scene
Of degradation, ugliness and tears,
The record of disgraces best forgotten
A sullen page in human chronicles
Fit to erase." 3

On the contrary, art uses these negative and antagonistic elements because they are actual elements of the natural and human worlds which it aims to represent, and as life is found good and beautiful in these worlds just in proportion as it makes progress in transcending and surmounting evil, so art is found good and beautiful in proportion as it repre-

1. *The Ring and the Book*, VII-514.
2. *The Return of the Druses*, II-210.
3. *Paracelsus*, V-47.

sents life in the process of struggle and triumph over its antagonists. Art of this sort, however serious and tragic the struggle it represents, can never be melancholy and hopeless, it can never represent the world and its life as a thing altogether evil and "fit to erase," for the evil of art in Browning's description, in whatever form it appears, is always shown to be in some stage or other on the way to ultimate defeat. Such an art must forever show us a tragedy-comedy, a "Divina Comedia," for such is life itself to those who see it whole.

3. The Methods of Art.

A. The Embodiment of Truths in Forms.

One of the most significant parts of Browning's theory concerning the work of art is that in which he attempts to explain how the ideas or truths which constitute the materials of art are mediated to human apprehension. He takes for granted, of course, that the mediation must be made through the various established forms within the several art mediums or through modifications of these forms, and the body of his theory has to do with explaining how the truths to be mediated are so put into art forms as to be apprehended in their true nature; in other words, his theory endeavors to make clear the relationships set up between the truths and the forms within which they are embodied. Because of these facts it is necessary, in his case as in that of the romantic aestheticians preceding him, to speak of the views set forth at this point as theories on the methods of art rather than theories on art forms.

In his particular views as to what the methods really are by which truths are mediated in art forms and what the relationships set up between contents and embodiment mediums seem to be, in these matters Browning is quite at variance

from the men who laid the basis of modern aesthetics.¹ As an approach to an understanding of his opinions on the subject may be well to have the old roué of "The Inn Album" again remind us

"That bard's a Browning; he neglects form:
But ah, the sense, ye Gods, the weighty sense!"²

for no accurate understanding of the poet's theory on the subject in hand can be had without thorough realization and constant remembrance that he considered the ideas or truths to be represented in art of prime significance and valued the forms employed to this end as things somewhat of the nature of necessary sacrifices whereby the truths might come to light. It is also necessary to recall at this point that the truths or ideas to be thus brought to light are spontaneous intuitions that are forever in the process of growth through constant apprehensions of new aspects and phases of the natural and human worlds of which they report. The forms into which these spontaneous truths are to be embodied will need to be such as to manifest the evolutionary character of the truths, then, if they are at all faithfully to represent them. Forms that will represent truths of this sort and in this fashion must necessarily be forms that grow constantly more transparent and less noticeable, less attractive, in themselves; that is to say, successive art works and art periods must continually find forms which possess these qualities in an increasing degree. Though the forms can never entirely disappear they must be constantly immolated in new ways and to higher degrees, must be labored and perfected toward the vanishing point in order that more of the truth content to be represented, may be made accessible.

The whole process here under discussion is best explained

1. Cf. Chapter I, Section 5C, above.

2. The Inn Album, I-773.

in Browning's works where he refers to it as a disengaging of soul from body and a thrusting back of this disengaged soul into matter for the purpose of a better understanding of its nature. The artist realizes that,

" . . . A soul, whate'er its might,
Is insufficient to its own delight,
Both in corporeal organs and in skill
By means of which to body forth its Will—
And, after, insufficient to apprise
Men of that Will, oblige them recognize
The Hid by the Revealed—" 1

so he employs art for his ends. The Will here in question is the artist's own imagination, his own inner consciousness, in which, as near as may be, all nature and mankind have a potential existence in the form of ideas or truths which make up the artist's whole conception of his universe and its life. The artist's ideas concerning nature and man are, in this sense, bits of soul disengaged from body and become parts of his own soul wherefrom and in the light of which he projects, throws out, these ideas into artficed forms analogous to those in which they were first apprehended. It is thus that he creates works of art fit to represent to himself and to other men the nature of soul life, whether that of nature or of man.

Inasmuch as the ideas so projected are from the artist's own store of ideas concerning the nature of the external world and man they may be called a surplusage of his own soul. Because of the life and constitution given the ideas in the artficed shapes wherein they are thrown they seem to reanimate or heighten the life of the original shapes to which the artficed ones are analogous. However accurately the artficed shapes are patterned after actual ones of the natural and the human words, then, the truths of the

1. Sordello, III-97.

natural shapes are presented in the artificed ones as though in a continual process of surmounting and escaping the limitations of the forms into which they have been embodied.

Such is the general nature of the methods whereby ideals are put into forms such as render them increasingly accessible, and it may now be well to note what some of Browning's artists are made to say as to their doings in this field. Aprile, for one, declares that

"Every passion sprung from man, conceived by man,
Would I express and clothe in its right form,
Or blend with others struggling in one form,
Or show repressed by an ungainly form." 1

Andrea del Sarto says,

"I can do with my pencil what I know,
What I see, what at bottom of my heart
I wish for." 2

Galuppi's actual forms are mentioned and we hear of "Lesser thirds, diminished sixths, and commiserating sevenths," as tones which, by their proper mixture with other tones, give an idea somehow of the whole life of Venice, of the whole life of man, and of the immortality of man's soul.³ Even an Abt Vogler, for all his close approach to attaining pure spirit without form, still mixes tones to get his "star," and still comes back to the common chord, the "C Major of this life," at the end.⁴ That the forms and their obedience to laws is more apparent in the other arts than in music gives music highest rank among the arts, as attaining nearest to the representation of spirit free from form, but it nowise allows a complete independence from forms even to this highest of the arts.

It is evident from the foregoing that all ratings of art works, in Browning's opinion, are to be made just on the

1. Paracelsus, II-23.

2. Andrea del Sarto, 346.

3. A Toccata of Galuppi's 175.

4. Abt Vogler, 383.

basis of the degree to which ideas, truths, or meanings are rendered accessible in their mediums. It is here that Browning and his aesthetic predecessors are especially at variance, for the latter took as the basis for such ratings the adequacy between form and content.¹ Upon this new and different basis Browning also makes his classifications of art, those between Greek and Christian art, objective and subjective art, and between the several fine arts, as we shall see when his classifications come directly under investigation. Yet even with this basis of rating in mind, the poet is constrained to admit that there are some ideas or truths that lend themselves to more full revelation in certain art forms than in others. In other words, different sorts of ideas require different sorts of art mediums in order best to indicate the ascendancy of spirit over embodiment. In various passages he intimates that the things which appear most dependent upon form in actual life are best represented by the formative arts, while the things that appear to be chiefly of the spirit, such as motives and feelings, are best represented by the speech and tone arts wherein the forms are less accentuated.² He insists that to show the ascendancy of spirit over form must always be the aim of the representation in art works, but that, if the works are to be true to the things represented, the mediums and forms must be found "Answering to and indicative of the process of the informing spirit,"³ which is to say just this, that the degree of the ascendancy of the spirit indicated in the art works must correspond exactly with the degree of this ascendancy apparent in the objects of representation themselves.

On the whole matter of the accommodation of truths to forms in art, then, we may say that Browning allows no

1. Cf. Chapter I, Section 5C, above.

2. Cf. Paracelsus, II-23; and Saul, V-180.

3. Essay on Shelley, 1011.

sacrifice of the truths for the sake of the accommodation, but that he requires always that the forms be immolated in order that art may truly represent the gradual enfranchisement of spirit from its embodiments, which is the actual process of all life according to his philosophy. His ideal of art, as Professor Gingerich states it, is just this, that the artist should "Fill a form so full of expanding life that the life in it tends to reach above and through the form and make the form itself give way."¹ Something quite like this is Hegel's description of Romantic art, and there is a hint in Browning's "Andrea del Sarto" of Hegel's own judgment upon such art, namely, that it leads toward the transcendence and end of art itself, for the reason that this approaches the manifestation of pure spirit without form, a state of spirit manifestation altogether contradictory to the very nature of art. There are hints from Browning as from Hegel, too, that the forms of art themselves should undergo proportionate growth with the ideas to be represented, but both men seem to abandon these hints,—Hegel to glorify philosophy wherein no mediums of representation such as art employs are needed, and Browning to glorify an increasing manifestation of spirit growth such as he finds possible only by the use in art of constantly more transparent, more revelational, and so less conspicuous and less complex art forms.²

It must be noted, further, that it is Browning's opinion, as it was that of his predecessors in romantic aesthetics, that the very nature of art whereby it manifests truths in form mediums makes art a means for the healing of all the apparent antitheses of life. There is a difference, however. The romanticists before Browning said that because

1. Gingerich: Wordsworth, Tennyson and Browning, 240.

2. Cf. Ixion, 916; Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, IV-765; *Fifine at the Fair*, XCII-725 and CXXIV-733.

art takes seemingly free and unbounded truths concerning the nature of the universe and its life and embodies these in fixed forms which are limited and limiting in their nature, and yet seems to show these truths as if resting in freely chosen forms, as if contented and at home in these restricting embodiments,—just because of this, so the founders of romantic aesthetics said, all the seeming antagonisms of life and its universe seem suddenly to be reconciled in art. There is a significant difference in Browning's report of the matter. For him the truths of art are never represented as though contented and at home in their forms, but rather as though projecting out of, overflowing, and transcending their mediums. Accordingly, the reconciliations he would have discoverable in art are those sufficient only to indicate the necessity of life in forms while the spirit makes its progress toward an eventual escape. He would have art heal the antitheses of life only in the sense that art is the image of the spirit in the process of transcending matter, and though spirit cannot altogether escape its material embodiment on earth, still a representation of progress toward such an escape is, in itself, a partial reconciliation sufficient to serve for here and now because of its promise of total freedom of spirit in the hereafter.

Freedom and necessity, the many and the one, success and failure, the ideal and the real, the finite and the infinite, are only a few of the many antitheses which Browning finds resolved in art in the fashion and to the extent I have just indicated.¹ He declares that "All the arts are mediators, between the soul and the infinite,"² and he finds in Shelley's complete works "A sublime fragmentary essay toward a presentment of the correspondency of the uni-

1. Cf. *Sordello*, VI-122; and *Rabbi Ben Ezra*, 384.
2. *Letters of R. B. and E. B.*, Vol. I-542.

verse to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the Ideal."¹ The quotation just made from the "Essay on Shelley" is a fit summary of his views on the matter under discussion, for any art is high art, in Browning's estimation, just in proportion as it is "a fragmentary essay" of the sort there described; and just in proportion as it is this sort of thing it has reconciliations for the antitheses of life sufficient to indicate to man the nature of life and so keep him forever striving further to escape the restricting, antagonistic forms which still forever occasion life's need of reconciliations.²

B. The Characteristic or Typical.

The Characteristic or typical may be considered a method of art such as so accommodates content and form that the art product represents typical or characteristic objects of their species and kind. In romantic aesthetics before Browning the characteristic was defined as the freely chosen measure or form quality taken by ideas whereby the individual, whether in nature or humanity, might stand as representative of its whole class, and the characteristic or typical in art then became the representation of this representative individual. In the romantic aesthetics, moreover, the typical individual was said to be such as to require that its representation in art should show shape and essence, form and spirit, in perfect adequacy to one another. Such a notion of the characteristic or typical would be impossible for Browning, since in nature and man he recognizes as highest that which best manifests spirit in the process of triumphing over form. Accordingly, the characteristic or typical in art becomes for him that which best represents just such a progress in the en-

1. Essay on Shelley, 1014.

2. Cf. Dowden: *Studies in Literature*, 80

franchisement of the spirit, provided only that the representation of the status between spirit and form be faithful to the actual status apprehended in the objects set forth. The perfect type, or altogether characteristic, he finds impossible on earth and so impossible for art representations also, since the perfectly typical or characteristic would be just the absolute, whole and perfect, which is unrealizable in natural and human life.

In what he has to say of the characteristic Browning regularly refers to it as the type or the typical. He began his work with planning the representation of a group of typical souls and he achieved three works in accordance with his scheme in which he showed three individuals tending toward "the type," but never achieving the completely typical. He has both Jules and the Apostle John speak of sculptors as artists who strive and fail to realize the altogether typical in their art works.¹ A representative passage to indicate his views on the subject is that in "Fifine at the Fair" wherein the speaker declares that art's process is like nature's in that art also

"Must fumble for the whole, once fixing on a part
However poor, surpass the fragment, and aspire
To reconstruct thereby the ultimate entire.
Art, working with a will, discards the superflux,
Contributes to defect, toil on till.—fiat lux.—
There's the restored, the prime, the individual type!"²

Here it is admitted that art somewhat improves upon nature, that its representation comes nearer the typical than the thing itself, and this because art is selective and suggestive and so does heighten the ascendancy of spirit over form in its representations. Nevertheless, throughout his works the poet repeatedly insists that even in art the per-

1. Cf. *Pippa Passes*, 142; and *A Death in the Desert*, 391.

2. *Fifine at the Fair*, XLIV-712.

fect, the archtype, is unattainable, since form is inescapable in art as in life, and in both of these

"Divergency from type was earth's effect."¹

C. The Symbolic.

The symbolic is also to be thought of as a method of art when it is considered as a means of accommodating content to form in such a way that the representation in art is intended to be a symbol or something different than what it actually pretends to represent. It is closely related to the allegoric method, but upon this I find nothing said in Browning's works. His use of symbolism exceeds his theory on the subject,² but he has some few comments that may indicate a generalized concept on the matter, at least. In the usual significance of the term it is safe to say that he is opposed to symbolism in art, and on the ground that ready-made and commonplace objects everywhere about us can do the work of a symbol full as well as art works.³ But if a symbol be understood to be a part used to represent a whole of its kind, or the external manifestation of a thing such as will serve for a sign of the thing's whole nature, inner as well as outer, then Browning is decidedly in support of the symbolic as a method of art.⁴ He specifically points out that things are seen only point by point, and that each view is only a symbol of the real thing behind.⁵ Alos he holds art's method to be just such a "fumbling for the whole." through successive representations of parts as is indicated in the symbolic.

The significant point with regard to symbolism in

1. Aristophanes' *Apology*, 640.

2. Chesterton: *Robert Browning*, 127.

3. Fra Lippo Lippi, 345.

4. *Ferishtah's Fancies*, XII-943.

5. *Bernard de Mandeville*, 954.

Browning's theory is that all art works aim to give an image of life and so may be taken to be symbols of life. Art works, he says, can become such symbols only so far as their contents and forms are so inadequated to one another as to show the contents overflowing the forms and so seeming to triumph over and escape from them; for only as art works manifest such a phenomenon do they truly indicate the nature and so become a symbol of the life process. In this sense, then, art is indeed symbolic in its methods. Everywhere Browning's artists find their work imaging and symbolizing the nature of life, and everywhere his appreciators of art, too, find pleasures just in proportion to their discovery of the nature of the life process imaged and symbolized for them in art products. And all this just because art uses the methods of life itself wherein spirit strives in and makes progress toward surmounting flesh. Here, as everywhere in his aesthetics,—but here and throughout his explanation of the methods of art most of all,—we find the progress principle the central one upon which the poet makes his explication; and he believes art symbolic, then, just in the degree to which the progress it employs and represents is at once also the very progress which is everywhere at work in the world.

4. The Purposes of Art.

A. General Considerations.

It is inherent in the nature of man to believe that there is an aim and purpose in his life. Then, too, in the objectifications of himself whereby he anthropomorphically explains all outside himself he naturally objectifies a purpose also into the objects that come under his observation and into his thought. He finds such a purpose necessary, in fact, for not otherwise is he able to explain to himself the

nature of things. And even if he is a bit doubtful as to whether there is an actual purpose existent "out there," man still declares that things are at least ideally purposive, they are as if purposive. Always and everywhere all things seem to work, consciously or unconsciously, toward some end or to serve some cause.

Art works, though in themselves artficed rather than natural objects, are still representations of objects actually existent, consequently all that has just been said as to purposes is apposite to them also. And though the purposes of art works may be thought of as aims of the artists or as effects among the appreciators of art, they may also be considered in the light of purposes objectified into and manifested by the art products themselves. At any rate, they always do seem as if purposive. It is for this reason that aesthetics has always preferred to give attention to the purposes of art in connection with its explanations of art products rather than in connection with its explanation of artists or of the appreciations and effects of art. Because of this a study of Browning's theories concerning the purposes of art finds its proper place somewhere here among his theories on the nature of art products.

But though the purposes of art do seem to lie within the art products they cannot have significance otherwise than with reference to the human mind, consequently they can be interpreted only in human terms and from the standpoint either of the producers or of the appreciators of the products in which they seem to lie. For this reason the purposes Browning assigns to art may first be taken up under two heads; namely, those purposes which seem to lie in art products as though they had been aims of the producing artists and, secondly, those purposes which seem to lie in the art works as though they were effects expected among the appreciators of these works. These two groups

of purposes for art are not, of course, mutually exclusive, nor are they clearly defined by any means; yet they do serve to indicate a rough twofold differentiation between the many art purposes assigned by aestheticians generally and may assist somewhat in simplifying the discussion of Browning's theories on this complex subject.

The art for art's sake theory which would seem to give art works a purpose not included in either of the above groups, while it may be represented as a notion concerning the purpose of art that is held by certain characters in Browning's poems,¹ is by no means a part of his own theories as to the ends of art. For him the art work is always somehow for the sake of the processes involved in the production and appreciation, processes displayed in the product, to be sure, but never for the sake of the product itself independently. For one so concerned as Browning with individual personality and the development of the human soul as the highest good, for such an one art for art's sake was an impossible creed.

But there are other purposes of art which Browning does champion that still refuse to be classified within the two groups specified, and for the reason that they are involved directly with and really include all the purposes embraced in both these groups. Such are the "mediation of truth" and the "Whole life" purposes, two ends for art that, in Browning's description, are really only two aspects of the same thing and ends for art that really defy subordinate groupings because they become one whole purpose of so comprehensive a nature as to take up into itself all the would-be minor purposes for art works. As man necessarily accepts momentary and subordinate aims, however, in any and all of his activities, so Browning also recog-

1. Cf. *The Bishop Orders His Tomb*, 348; *My Last Duchess*, 252; *Paracelsus*, III-31; and *Ferishtah's Fancies*, XII-946.

nizes the various momentary and subordinate purposes of art as valid ones for times and occasions, and then finds these all embraced and taken up into the end of mediating truth which, from another standpoint, is at once also a "whole life" purpose for art. We have, then, for consideration the several subordinate purposes of art of the two groups cited and the whole purpose which includes all these and gives unity to all the ends of art specified in Browning's aesthetics.

B. Purposes of Art Works from the Standpoint of the Producing Artists.

There are many sorts of ideas or truths which artists may elect to present in their works, but as they elect to present one sort or the other preeminently they seem to have aims with respect to what their works shall contain and make manifest. So, for example, they seem to strive to give a transcript of nature, a representation of things such as will express themselves, or a synthetic image of of some historical period. To imitate nature, to express the self, and to express artistically an historical epoch, these seem to be three quite clearly defined purposes of art from the standpoint chiefly of the producing artists.

The imitation of nature, in some sense or other, has always been considered a necessary aim of artists. However much a certain truth to nature has been insisted upon, however, there has always been a reservation of some sort too. Even those who found nature only a huge mechanism and art a mere assistant to science and philosophy in explaining this mechanism, even these rationalistic aestheticians agreed that the artist must be something more than a mere copyist of nature.¹ For the romanticists, with Browning among them, who interpreted nature and all else

1. Cf. Parker: *Lectures on Aesthetics*, 7/5/19.

anthropomorphically, who knew nature only as they found themselves exemplified in her, for these aestheticians a mere imitation of what they conceived nature to be had to become at once also an interpretation of nature in the light of human life. But the Browning among them refused to stop even here. He insisted that if nature seems to have significance only in the terms and for the interpretation of human life, then the artist ought to select for artistic representation only such moments of natural life as would best serve to make clear the human significance of nature. The artists who do this represent much more than the external forms of nature, for their art works, even where they represent natural objects only, aim to show an inner nature that is in sympathy with and analogous to the inner life of man; and they aim, further, to show that this inner nature is really the same immanent divine essence which constitutes all activity and life wherever manifested. It is in this sense, then, and this sense only, that Browning would have art works aim to be an imitation of nature.

But art works that seek to represent nature in the manner above indicated cannot falsify and distort the external forms of nature with the idea that by so doing they can better manifest the inner life there, for to distort the external forms is at once also to falsify the report concerning the nature of the inner life within those forms. There must always be a correspondency between the artist's work and the verities of nature if his report is to be true and valid.¹ He does well indeed to hold closely to the actual and exact forms where he represents natural objects, for even when he does so he can still have something beyond the mere forms apparent in his products.² He will, in

1. *Essay on Shelley*, 1010.

2. Cf. Francis Furini, II-965; *The Lady and the Painter*, 963.

fact, need to get his forms from nature's shapes, for all his attempted types and archtypes will come from the shapes that life and spirit take in the world.¹ But this is not the end of the matter, for, with regard to the artist,

" . . . Whether he came near or kept aloof
The several forms he longed to imitate,
Not there the kingship lay . . .
These forms, unalterable first as last,
Proved him her copier, not the protoplast
Of nature " 2

and he must make the exhibition of tree or of veritable human form a means of exhibiting essence in its natural state of expansion and growth within the tree or human shape. He must reproduce nature and beat her too by interpreting her,³ by showing her originative force to be the veritable creative energy that pervades all things and is only first conscious in man. He must show the world

"The beauty and the wonder and the power,
The shapes of things, their colors, lights and shades,
 fair town's face, yonder river's line,
The mountain round it and sky above,
Much more the figures of man, woman, child,
These are the frame to"

but he must show these in such a way as to bring out their meanings.

" . . . This world's no blot for us,
Nor blank; it means intensely, and means good." 4

To find and image forth the world's meaning must be the artist's aim, however exact and accurate his representations of the external forms may be. And so far as he does this, whether he represents a "Cullion's hanging face" or "higher things," he thereby to some degree always takes a "Prior's

1. *Fifine at the Fair*, LII-713.
2. *Sordello*, V-115.
3. *Fra Lippo Lippi*, 344.
4. *Ibid.*

pulpit-place" and interprets to himself and to others the Deity that is everywhere immanent.

To express the artist's self, in some sense or other, has also been a purpose very generally ascribed to art by aestheticians. Quite early in his career Browning declares, apropos of this subject, that poets

" . . . Are fain invest
The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,"¹

and everywhere throughout his works he reasserts a belief in the self-expression theory in this sense. "My poetry," he writes to Miss Barrett, "is far from the completest expression of my being . . .", but he goes on in the letter to say that a more complete and perfect expression of himself is still to come in the many works he plans to do.² He has seemed only to make others speak and so only to represent others, yet he confesses that he himself has thus managed to

"Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem."³

He may object to the display of the artist's own private self and of the characteristics in which he is peculiar, but he is insistent that art shall reveal the spirit life, the soul, of the artist.⁴ He requires that art shall always and everywhere attempt to reveal the spirit life of the individual just so far as this life is the common divine essence immanent in all. The artist's expression of self in this sense is, therefore, an expression of the inner nature of all men and of all life. It is in this sense that Browning holds all art works to be an expression of the self of the artist.

The theory of art's purpose just set forth is one version of the "expression" theory. There is another well-known version of this theory, however, which declares that

1. *Sordello*, I-79.

2. *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, Vol. II-174.

3. *One Word More*, XIV-363.

4. *At the Mermaid*, 807; *House*, 808.

the true purpose of art is to express the character of an age, whether of its own age or some other period it matters not. In regard to these somewhat contradictory versions of the expression theory Miss Barrett, in 1846, wrote to Mr. Browning that "Art surely, if art is anything, is the expression, not of the characteristics of an age, except accidentally, . . . essentially it is the expression of Humanity in the individual being. . . . I do not believe, for one, that genius in the arts is a mere reflection of the character of the times. Genius precedes surely, initiates. It is genius which gives an age its character and imposes its own colour. . . ." And to this Browning replies, "All you write about art is most true."¹ The conditions under which these statements were made, of course, must somewhat put us on guard against taking them too literally, yet there are pronouncements of Browning's elsewhere and under normal conditions which show him quite in agreement with the views to which he here subscribes. In the "Essay on Shelley" he declares that "The misapprehensiveness of his age is exactly what a poet is sent to remedy,"² and another place he writes,

"Artistry being battle with the age
It lives in! Half-life,—silence while you learn
What has been done; the other half,—attempt
At speech, amid world's wail of wonderment—
'Here's something done was never done before!'
To be the very breath that moves the age
Means not to have breath drive you bubble-like
Before it—but yourself to blow." 3

Neither of the above views is the whole of the matter. Browning as well as his wife knew that poetry or art of any kind, "To be of paramount value must do more than reflect a passing fashion; that in a certain sense it must

1. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. II-157 to 159.

2. Essay on Shelley, 1011.

3 Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, II-754.

. . . be out of time and space, expressing ideas and passions which are parts of our abiding humanity.”¹ But the poet was aware, too, that even while expressing “our abiding humanity” the arts can never escape from bearing the “seal of the age” in which they are produced.²

Art is frequently set forth as a representation of the thought and spirit of its own or some other epoch, and that Browning believed it to be within art’s province to do this is well attested by his own practice. His own works contain clear attempts to give the scientific, moral, religious, and aesthetic thought and spirit of his own times and less frequent but little less successful attempts to do the same service for certain earlier epochs.³

And our poet has direct acknowledgment, too, that art is a means of perpetuating an age and of reconstructing the past for present understanding in a way more effective even than that of the historians.⁴ He would say, however, that as a historian the artist is not concerned with the external events, political and military affairs, for instance, nor with the passing show of social life,⁵ except as these cast light upon the development of individual personality. His concern is always with the spirit and thought of the times to be represented and, as he sees it, these are the things to be gotten from and to be represented through individual personality. Wherever apprehended, at any rate, they must have become a part of the artist’s own store of truths and will necessarily be interpreted in the light of his personality when they appear in art products.

Whatever age it represents, then,—this is Browning’s complete verdict on the matter,—art still bears the seal of the age in which it is produced and, above all, it bears the

1. Dowden: Robert Browning, 124.

2. Letters op. cit., Vol. I-542.

3. Milsand: Robert Browning, Rev. des deux Mondes, XI-689.

4. Sordello, II-84; The Ring and the Book, I-422.

5. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, 681.

impress of the individual genius by whom it is created, one who cannot escape some marks of his own age, to be sure, yet one who is, nevertheless,

"One of God's large ones, tardy to condense
Itself into a period."1

C. The Purposes of Art from the Standpoint of its Appreciation and Effects.

The ends of art evident from the standpoint of its appreciation and effects have given rise to many of the current theories as to its purposes. These are purposes that overlap somewhat the purposes seen from the standpoint of art production and they are closely involved, too, with all the problems of art appreciation. They are purposes, nevertheless, that seem to lie within art products themselves and to look out from there and to promise certain definite results. In this sense they have a rough autonomy of their own and an existence apparently independent of the appreciators of art who are to be affected by them. They are purposes, in other words, that seem to live in art works for appreciation without dependence upon the individual operation of the appreciative process.

The purposes of art of the sort here defined that are more or less clearly dealt with in Browning's aesthetics are generally characterized as utilitarian, hedonistic, moral, and religious. I shall here extend the meaning of the term "hedonistic" to include effects of art commonly known as "relief" and "katharsis," too, though the term does not properly cover these and is not customarily employed to do so. It is necessary to note, also, that the religious purpose mentioned is not one of the regularly acknowledged purposes of the aestheticians. The course of

1. *Sordello*, II-90.

the discussion will perhaps show some justification for the classification and procedure here decided upon.

The utilitarian purpose of art is open to various interpretations, but the usual one is to the effect that art is to serve some definite useful end; that art works, for example, are to be serviceable in instigating to prayer, in relieving sorrow, or in inciting and guiding conduct of any sort in given situations. In this sense the utilitarian purpose may be identified with the various subordinate purposes above mentioned,—with the religious, the hedonistic, the purgative, and the moral purposes,—provided only that there is some definite utility to be served. Browning is in support of a utilitarian purpose of this sort only to the extent that he believes these subordinate and momentary purposes must be served if the one central purpose of art is to be fostered. He has a great artist leave his clay cast of a hand to study for years its original just in order to learn “what use survives the beauty,” and then spend years more in trying if he

“ . . . Might reproduce
One motive of the power profuse
Flesh and bone and nerve that make
The poorest coarsest human hand
An object worthy to be scanned
A whole life long for their sole sake.”¹

In reality, therefore, it is not the work of art in itself that serves the useful purpose, in such cases, but it is the life of the thing represented by the art work, a thing whose life is better understood through the work of art because its utility even is here given an objectified representation.

In fine, art works have a utility, in Browning's opinion, only as they help to an understanding of the universe and its life, an understanding that assists producers and appreciators of art alike in all the activities of the moment and in all the doings of a full and complete life.² A use beyond

1. James Lee's Wife, VIII-376.

2. Ferishtah's Fancies, X-941.

the immediate pleasure or immediate service of any sort is to be gotten from the art work else it is a thing that could as well be substituted for by other things and would have no autonomous purpose of its own.¹ No mere instigating to prayer or inciting to some particular line of conduct will serve.² But a use such as survives the beauty and serves for the whole life's enlargement in its understanding of how to live and make its progress, this sort of utility art may and does have, but this is just the "whole life" purpose of art, belonging properly outside the present classification, but seen here in one of its germane subordinate phases.

If the utilitarian purpose for art in its narrower interpretations gains little credence from our poet the hedonistic purpose of commonly accepted meaning fares little better. The hedonistic theory is to the effect, baldly stated, that art is intended only to give pleasure. Browning uses the term pleasure usually in a sense so broad that it includes all the satisfactions experienced in a strenuous and ever-aspiring progress, and he allows that art does assist to this end. I use the term hedonistic, however, as I have said, to designate a purpose of art so described in Browning's aesthetics as to seem to include something of the hedonistic, emotionalistic, and katharsis or purgative purposes differentiated by many aestheticians. I should say, perhaps, that Browning allows some vitality to all three of these purposes, but that he so mixes them up as to make any differentiation between them almost indiscernible in his works. It is clear, at any rate, that he finds pleasure, of the sort above described, looking out of as well as resulting from art works; that he finds the passions represented as well as stimulated by art; and that he sees in art

1. Christopher Smart, IX-961.

2. Fra Lippo Lippi, 342.

works themselves, as well as in their appreciators and producers, the evidences of relief and purgation.¹ He has most to say on relief as a purpose for art, but his relief means only a relief from the moment's state and its difficulties in order to meet a higher state and new difficulties. Such a relief he believes art represents and brings to all who have aught to do with it. In such relief men find their pleasure and the purifying of their passions, but never a resting place to be content in nor any complete escape from earth's difficulties such as Schopenhauer found in art's momentary effects.²

Like the romanticists before him Browning was opposed to a moral purpose being the sole and definitely discernible purpose of art. I am not quite sure, however, that he would altogether subscribe to Schiller's belief that the art work "Carries out no design, helps perform no duty, is equally incapable of establishing character or affording enlightenment of any sort."³ He would say that there may be moral truths visible in art and moral ends that are definitely served by it, but that these are never found to be the sole purpose there nor even the paramount one, where the art products of a lifetime or even great individual works are in question. His constant concern for the ethical was a concern for the whole life of the spirit of man and was, therefore, something more than is commonly connoted by an ethical purpose, though he allows the latter to appear in art as a part of the larger thing he has in mind, as Schiller and others among the founders of modern aesthetics did not. But if by an ethical purpose in art one means that art is an image of life as a whole for life as a whole, then Browning, like Schiller, does believe in the moral objective for art. But Browning differs from

1. Cf. Cleon, 360; Charles Avison, VII-971; Paracelsus, IV-39.

2. *The Guardian Angel*, 195; Aristophanes' *Apology*, 637.

3. Cf. Chapter I, Section 5D, above.

Schiller and the others a bit in that he believes and shows that the "whole life" purpose of art is made up of and is attained by the operation of all the subordinate purposes ever argued for in aesthetics, and he is against the exclusion of any of these subordinate purposes so long as no one of them becomes paramount or excludes the others. It is in this sense that he would allow even the operation of a definite moral purpose in art.¹

In a like case with the purposes just discussed there is a religious purpose that may seem to look out of and promise results from art works. Works manifesting such purposes may represent religious characters or objects of religious association. They may be used in religious connections, lining

" . . . Endless cloisters and eternal aisles
With the same series, Virgin, Babe, and Saint." ²

But a "skull and bones" would serve as well to instigate to prayer, and with no larger purpose than this, with no representation of some promise for life as a whole, such works must "gently die" in the cold seclusion of neglect. Religious truths along with all other sorts of truths, art will necessarily embody in its works, and to these as to all its truths it will give, in its representations, that appearance of purposiveness which the truths otherwise enjoy in their non-artistic means of existence and circulation throughout the world. Thus a religious purpose will seem to lie in art works along with their other purposes, even while all such ends will necessarily remain subordinate and contributory to the whole purpose, which includes them all. And this whole purpose may be called religious as well as ethical, too, for it is a purpose whereby art would give an image of all life for life as a whole in order

1. Christopher Smart, IX-961; Francis Furini, X-969.

2. Pictor Ignotus, 342.

that life may appear and be understood as a progress toward that "One far-off divine event" which marks man's advent into the hereafter. In indicating such a progress art, as Browning viewed it, carries a high spiritual significance. It was in this sense that he believed "All our life is some form of religion," its art activities and experiences with the rest.¹

D. The Mediation of Truth and Whole Life Purpose of Art.

All the purposes of art thus far cited as having a sort of differentiation in Browning's aesthetics were considered subordinate and insufficient purposes in themselves except as they signified a larger and all-inclusive purpose for which they themselves might be symbolically taken. What art does, the poet says, is to mediate truths from and representative of the whole universe and its life. These truths are the artist's ideas concerning the nature of the universe and its life, ideas made up of his experiences of and reflections on all manner of objects and phenomena. They are the concepts carrying still the sensations whence they originated, shot through with the emotions accompanying their formation, and imaged, too, into shapes agreeable to their visualization in perceptual wholes for the mental eye and, in the case of the actual art works, for reexperience through the senses.

The purpose of art is to "speak truth" gathered from all spheres of the natural and human worlds. The scientific discoveries and thoughts of the artist's times are inevitably a part of himself, to some extent, and these are artistically conceived and embodied in his works whether he will or no. So, too, the moral, philosophical, religious,

1. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-221. Cf. also Schmidt: Robert Browning's *Verhältnisz zu Frankreich*, 159.

and aesthetic truths and thoughts of his times.¹ Likewise the thought and spirit of past times will be a part of the artist's store of ideas and will be artistically transformed into the ideas or truths such as lend themselves to embodiment in art products. 'The evolutionary idea, the idea of life as a probation, the idea of God as an immanent presence in nature and man, the idea that good and evil are forever and everywhere mixed on earth, that truth is relative, that art speaks truth, that pleasure is never a permanent possession of man,—all and any of the sorts of truths or ideas known to man are material for art and no one sort is excluded or has paramount right of way. But art takes the ideas that are concepts and transforms them to its purpose by mixing them with fancy, it throws them back into conjunction with their original experience elements and so brings them forth as perceptual wholes.² In this way the truths are enlarged so that each one in itself stands as symbol or image of the world and life. So Schumann's "Carnival" is heard and one imagines himself in Venice at Carnival time, and contemplating it all afterward is able to say,

" There went
Conviction to my soul that what I took of late
For Venice was the world; its carnival—the state
Of mankind, masquerade in lifelong permanence
For all time, and no particular feast-day." 3

Each particular truth or idea is thus, by art's transformation, lifted out of the particular and raised into the universal.

A summary of Browning's whole theory with regard to the mediation of truth in art occurs at the close of "The Ring and the Book" in what is one of the most remark-

1. Fra Lippo Lippi, 342. Cf. also Berdoo: Browning as a Scientific Poet, B. S. P., 11-33.
2. *Fifine at the Fair*, CVIII-728.
3. *Fifine*, as above.

able pronouncements of aesthetics in poetic form that has yet been written. Appealing to his "British Public" Browning here offers the lesson of art which he declares all that lives should teach, namely, that

" . . . It is the glory and the good of Art
That Art remains the one way possible
Of speaking truth, to mouths like mine; at least.

Art—wherein man nowise speaks to men,
Only to mankind,—Art may tell a truth
Obliquely, do the thing shall breed the thought,
Nor wrong the thought, missing the mediate word.
So you paint your picture, twice show truth,
Beyond mere imagery on the wall,—
So, note by note, bring music from your mind,
Deeper than ever e'en Beethoven dived,—
So write a book shall mean beyond the facts,
Suffice the eye and save the soul beside." 1

But, someone asks, if art deals only in truths what then becomes of the Ideal in Art, the improvement upon nature and man, the representation of what we desire and of what might be? The answer is clear in Browning's aesthetics. What nature and man may be, the heart's desire of all life, is bound up within that life itself, and any truthful representation of anything art chooses to portray will inevitably indicate this fact by indicating a striving to become as well as a state of being in the thing represented. In fact a representation of anything in a perfectly static state and without suggestion of aspiration within the thing to escape that state is false to the thing and so misses truth at the same time that it misses the Ideal.² On the other hand, a representation of anything as entirely a becoming is altogether impossible, and, even if it were possible, would be equally false to natural and human life.³ The real and ideal are in essential combination in earthly life and representations of them as such are inescapable in art. Perfec-

1. *The Ring and the Book*, XII-601.

2. *Cleon*, 359; *A Grammarian's Funeral*, 280.

3. *Sludge, the Medium*, 411

tion in artistic forms sins on the side of the real,¹ and distortion of natural forms with the idea of escaping them and showing the absolute truth of the spirit, this sins equally in the direction of the ideal.² Between these two lies the real-idealistic purpose of the artist whereby he makes his "Fragmentary essay toward the presentment of the correspondence of the universe to Deity, of the natural to the spiritual, and of the actual to the Ideal."³

But why make representations that use truths and give an image of the universe and its life in this fashion? Because, Browning replies, these representations "Suffice the eye and save the soul beside." As they represent the whole life process of earth they assist man to understand earthly life as a whole and afford that deeper insight into the otherwise inexplicable yearnings, unaccountable acts, and half-expressions of the world about us; thus through art we grow in ability to live in the world while we make our progress toward some final afterlife escape from earthly conditions. Art, as Browning explains it, brings truths to man of such a sort and in such a manner that man may on all sides "Have life and have it more abundantly." If this be an ethical purpose for art it is also a utilitarian, a religious, a hedonistic, and every other kind of purpose, all in one; for this makes art one of the few high instruments for furthering the progress of man toward an ultimate state beyond life when the limitations of earth will be transcended.⁴ This is what I have called the "Whole Life" purpose of Browning's aesthetics, and this purpose theory he holds in company with the romanticist aestheticians who preceded him, except that the progress phase

1. Andrea del Sarto, 345.

2. Fra Lippo Lippi, 344.

3. Essay on Shelley, 1014.

4. Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, 754; Abt Volger, 383.

of the theory and the afterlife features of it were chiefly additions of Browning's own.

Art as a whole life activity for artists is their way of salvation. It also offers to other men all that these "fashioners" and "seers" have been able to apprehend concerning the secret of the world and of man and his purpose. The whole aim and end of art, expressed from the standpoint of the artist, but so put as to include all standpoints, may be read in our poet's own words in the "Essay on Shelley. The artist's whole virtue, he there declares, is that "Of looking higher than any manifestation yet made of beauty and good, in order to suggest from the utmost realization of the one a corresponding capability of the other, and out of the calm, purity, and energy of nature to reconstitute and store up, for the forthcoming state of man's being, a gift in repayment of that former gift in which man's own thought and passion had been lavished by the poet on the else-incompleted magnificence of the sunrise, the else-uninterpreted mystery of the lake,—so drawing out, lifting up, and assimilating this ideal of the future man, thus described as possible, to the present reality of the poet's soul already arrived at the higher state of development, and still aspirant to elevate and extend itself in conformity with its still-improving perceptions of, no longer the essential Human, but the actual Divine."¹ It is needless to add that the poet's whole function and virtue, as here specified, is exactly art's whole virtue and function as Browning regularly described it.

5. The Classifications of Art.

A. The Basis of Classification.

The basis upon which the various classifications of art have been made by aestheticians has always been laid

1. Essay on Shelley, 1010-11.

either in the nature of art mediums or else in the relation between the mediums and the contents of art. The romanticist aestheticians before Browning found the basis of their classifications regularly in the degree of harmony attained between the art contents and art forms, and upon this basis some of them differentiated art epochs and art types and all of them differentiated the several fine arts, though in the latter differentiation they differed somewhat in the rank given various ones of the several arts.¹ Browning agrees with this to the extent of accepting the relation between forms and contents as the basis for classification, but instead of the degree of harmony between the two he takes as the exact ground for his differentiations and ratings the degree of progress made in revealing the truth contents.² His theory, therefore, rejects the adequacy of forms and contents as a standard for the groupings and ratings of art works and accepts in preference the highest degree of inadequacy between the two that is still consonant with a true revelation of the actual inadequacy of forms to contents in the things of the world to be represented.³ Those things are considered highest in which the truth or spirit content seems most to project out of and overflow their forms, therefore the highest art works, art kinds, and art periods are those in which this same manifestation is best evidenced.

B. The Classifications Made.

The basis for his classifications of art is nowhere formally stated in Browning's works so one has to formulate it for himself from the classifications made and the general reasons given for them. The classifications to be

1. Cf. Chapter I, Section 5E, above.

2. Cf. Chapter III, Section 2, above.

3. Cf. Rabbi Ben Ezra, 385; Paracelsus, II-23; et. al.

found make three differentiations; one between Greek and Christian art, one between objective or analytic and subjective or synthetic art, and one, the most significant and clearly differentiated one on the accepted basis, between the several fine arts.

Greek and Christian art are classified as distinct and different art periods, with the latter marking a period of higher art works because of a greater transparency or revelational quality in its mediums and a consequent increased revelation of the truth contents of art products.¹ Within the Christian period there is also a vaguely apparent ranking of several periods of Italian painting² and several epochs of musical development,³ and the accepted basis of classification has a part in the differentiations here too, though it is not clearly the sole factor of determination.

The classification which differentiates objective and subjective art might well be called "a shadowy third" among the three. The differentiation is applied directly only to poetry and it is extremely doubtful at places whether or not the greater revelation of truth content is really the basis of the differentiation. The "Essay on Shelley" declares that the difference between the two sorts of poetry are due to a difference in the direction of appeal rather than in the faculties involved in production or in the objects represented; but this still fails to indicate just what the difference between the two themselves is and to make clear what the standard is by which the difference is judged. Several passages in "Sordello" and some parts of the "Essay on Shelley" quite clearly furnish evidence to the effect that there is a greater revelation of truths in subjective or synthetic poetry than in the objective or analytic

1. Fotheringham: *Studies in the Mind and Art of Browning*, 15.

2. For the material referred to here and in note 3, see the well-known groups of poems on painting and music, respectively.

sort, and here, then, is a standard of the sort mentioned and a recognizable means of differentiation.

The chief classification of art made in Browning's aesthetics and the one most clearly employing the basis of classification heretofore explained is that which differentiates the several fine arts and rates them according to their capacity to manifest content triumphing over form. The fullest and clearest differentiation of this sort occurs in "Paracelsus" where "The arts of sculpture, painting, poetry, and music are arranged in a spiritual hierarchy. Beginning with sculpture, the art which may be said to cling most closely to earth and to have its essential basis in the material, Aprile passes to painting, the less realistic of the imitative arts and from thence by way of poetry to music, the latter being looked upon as the most spiritual of the arts and the nearest akin to the infinite."¹ As Dr. Raymond has explained, the order given the arts by Browning is like that in Hegel's classification except that Hegel places poetry above music. It should be added, however, that there are passages in Browning that seem also to give poetry the preference,² though music deserves to be first according to the basis of rating and is so usually in his assignment of places, as we shall see in the study of his theories concerning the nature of the several arts which is to follow.

C. The Nature of the Several Fine Arts.

1. Architecture, Sculpture, and Painting.

Architecture is little touched upon in the aesthetics under study except as its material mass and structure are taken as points of comparison for the melodic mass and structure of music, a comparison made from the standpoint of

1. Raymond: *The "Incarnation" in the Poetry of Browning* 206.
2. Cf. Saul, XVII-183; *A Serenade*, 189; Charles Avison, VI-976.

the latter art, however, and so to be considered in that connection. The subjective and associative character of the idea or truth content of architecture is only hinted at in the few passages in his works dealing directly with this art. There is enough said of architectural products, nevertheless, to make clear that they, like all art works, are held to be images of the struggle and progress of life and that already here in the most formative of the arts it is required that an effort of content for ascendancy over form should look out of and be apprehensible in the art products.¹

But the poet's classification of the several arts really begins with sculpture. "First," says Aprile, in the "Paracelsus" passage previously referred to,

"First: I would carve in stone or cast in brass
The forms of earth." 2

The use of the human form as an archtype in sculpture is specifically pointed out, and among the various mediums in which sculpture works marble seems to be given preference as the one best suited to manifest the spirit life of the object or person to be represented.³ The art is shown to be quite limited in the extent to which it can portray thought and passion, the spirit life, just because of its necessarily close attention to its one archtypal form and because of the narrow sphere of action it can depict.⁴ And yet, for all that, Aprile declares that even in his sculpture,

"Every passion sprung from man, conceived by man,
Would I express and clothe in its right form,
Or blend with others struggling in one form,
Or show repressed in an ungainly form." 5

1. Balaustion's Adventure, 605. Cf. Bibliography.

2. Paracelsus, II-23.

3. Pippa Passes, II-136.

4. Easter Day, XXVI-333; The Inn Album, II-799.

5. Paracelsus, II-23.

But he is constrained to add, too, that he shall have to show also a

"Rare spirit, fettered to a stubborn body,
Endeavoring to subdue it and inform it
With its own splendor!"

Here already in an art very formative in character, then, Browning is insisting that the artist must discover the capabilities of the "block of marble" to become a "type of thought or passion" and must then put indication in the work itself of the cause for the static pose and gesture such as are necessarily represented in the works of so inflexible a medium as sculpture employs. And he points out that to do this the artist will need first to have apprehended the "shape's idea" and then to have had "the aspiration to produce the same," and that only then is he ready to reproduce the shape in sculptural work. Finally, because of the limitations imposed by sculpture's fixed form and its one archetype, Browning suggests that the art naturally falls into disuse and higher arts are preferred in order to escape the conventionalities that seem to be insurmountable here.¹

In the hierarchy of the arts painting comes next higher than sculpture. It is to this art that the sculptor is supposed likely to turn when he finds himself unable to transcend the conventionalities of his own art and to escape the intrusion of the ancient types in favor of the novel types palpable to his own spirit. It is this art also to which the early Italian painters are made to turn when the Greek ideal of perfection is outgrown and a way is sought to represent the soul in its development rather than in its static inhabitancy of a perfect body.² The transition to painting, then, seems to mark a passage to a higher art such as seems essential to every age when the higher truths

1. *Pippa Passes*, IV-142.

2. *Old Pictures in Florence*, 175 ff.

of that age are to be represented; and it seems also to mark a passage to a higher art epoch wherein painting is preferred to sculpture because it is better able to represent the increased apprehensions of truths concerning the soul's life and growth that have been come upon in the later age.

Within painting itself there seems to be ebb and flow in the ability of painters and of their historical epochs to represent spirit life and soul growth. A *Pictor Ignotus* has gone so far in reaction to the Greek ideal of art that he becomes an ascetic like the Prior of "Fra Lippo Lippi" who would have soul alone represented and give no attention to the body.¹ Lippo Lippi himself represents a painter and an era of painting when both the real and the ideal are given attention and there is effort to paint things as they are, upon the supposition that the soul's life and growth itself can thus best be represented. Then comes the refinement upon all this, corresponding to that in poetry, when the representations of soul by the representation of existing conceptions of external phenomena have become exhausted,² so we have an Andrea del Sarto and his times, a man and an epoch that can represent perfectly what is conceived but that have nothing new conceived to represent. Accordingly no soul growth appears in the things exhibited in the paintings of such an artist and his art is thought decadent. In a Francis Furini, however, the ideals of Fra Lippo Lippi are back in force again, so there seems ebb and flow in painting, as I have said, with respect to whether stress is put upon showing soul in a distorted, a perfected, or an idealized body or form. *Pictor Ignotus* and Andrea del Sarto, of course, represent artists who go to extremes toward the transcendent and the immanent, respectively, and where the one becomes an ascetic the

1. *Pictor Ignotus*, 341; *Fra Lippo Lippi*, 342.

2. *Essay on Shelley*, 1011.

other accordingly becomes a materialist. Both of them miss the highest art, which is that art which aims to give an image of life as it is, spirit in form, but spirit striving for ascendancy over its bodily limitations.

The objects open to representation in painting are from a much wider range than those of sculpture. The painter aims, indeed, to represent the world in which the shapes of the sculptor move and have their being; in other words, he aims to exhibit natural and human figures in their natural environments.¹ His art is likely to focus the attention on the human face, but the environs whereby the soul seems drawn to the face must also be exhibited, or at least suggested, in painting.² Even so, however, the point of stress is more than ever just the revelation of soul, and though there are more externals exhibited in the case of painting than in that of sculpture, these are all more subordinated in painting to the "main central truth, and soul o' the picture," they become

"Mere fragmentary studied facts
Which answer to the outward frame and flesh—
Not this nose, not that eyebrow, the other fact
Of man's staff, woman's stole, or infant's clout.
But lo, a spirit-birth conceived of flesh,
Truth, rare and real, not transcript, fact and false."³

The painter has his own field of representation within which, better than any other artist, he can show spirit's efforts and successes in ascendancy,⁴ but this field, however it may extend beyond that of sculpture, still stops short of fields wherein poetry and music alone can represent the higher degrees of spirit life and growth. Evolution of souls the painter does and must represent, but this

1. Paracelsus, II-23.

2. Francis Furini, X-968, et. al.

3. The Ring and the Book, IX-541.

4. Francis Furini, II-965.

evolution in lower stages than those portrayed in arts less dependent upon or limited by rigid and inflexible mediums.

II. Poetry: The Drama.

Although sometimes given first place among the arts in Browning's classification, poetry is usually rated by him as just above painting and just under music in its ability to image life as an attempt and partial success of spirit in escaping the concealing embodiments of its earthly manifestations. He would quite agree that, more than any other art except music, poetry "possesses an inarticulate power as well as an articulate one, and has the gift of projecting itself into regions where speech dies and leaves behind it a soul of meaning that cannot be uttered."¹ In the "Paracelsus" passage which differentiates the several arts Aprile speaks of poetry directly after painting, and concerning it he says,

"When those who looked on, pined to hear the hopes
And fears and hates and loves which moved the crowd,
I would throw down the pencil as the chisel,
And I would speak: "

2

Elsewhere the ability of poetry to share some of the features and capacities of music is pointed out, while at the same time the reaches of music which poetry cannot attain are clearly indicated.³ Painting, as contrasted to poetry, is said to be a symbol of finite and limited perfection, and poetry is credited with bringing the invisible more fully into play than the formative and plastic arts, wherein the sensuous elements have a more inescapable rigidity and opaqueness, are able to do.

Of the various theories concerning poetry to be found in Browning's many poems and passages on the subject

1. Selkirk: *Ethics and Aesthetics of Modern Poetry*, 95.

2. *Paracelsus*, II-23.

3. *Balaustion's Adventure*, 605; *Sordello*, II-87.

only a general survey can here be attempted. Such a survey may well begin by noting that the rhythmical form of poetry is thought by Browning to be caught, to some extent at least, from the rhythms of the natural world and to be in harmony with the thoughts which are expressed in it.¹ The language medium, however, he finds always more or less inadequate to the full expression of the emotionalized thoughts which comprise the contents of poetry. Upon these emotionalized thoughts, the meanings to be expressed, he places far more value than upon the language medium, however much he insists upon a correspondency between the two, for it is always the medium that must be brought into conformity with the content, it is always the form that must yield most for the sake of an artistic content in form.²

The things that poetry aims to set forth, however, are not stark-naked thoughts about life; they are ideas and images of life's process itself, and to be such they must contain the sensations, passions, images, and concepts,—the "perceptions whole"—of man. They are made up of and represent all man's experiences in order to appeal to all his experience and all his potentialities. Because of these facts all the scientific, ethical, philosophical, religious, aesthetic, and speculative ideas of any sort in the poet's time or any other time may become a part of the poetic representation, provided only that they are thrown back into the concrete wherein all the primary elements of experience have validity, and are given a life and form again such as they had while in the making. Concrete persons or things must be made the means of bringing forth the truths of poetry else these remain conceptual abstractions.³

1. Christmas Eve, IV-318; A Soul's Tragedy, I-289.

2. Two Poets of Croisic, 865. Transcendentalism, 335.

3. Griffin and Minchin: Life of Browning, 183.

Nevertheless, to accomplish the ends above described, the poet needs give only a few suggestive and sensibly apprehensible speeches, say, or acts, and from these one must take his word for the rest, for all else that appears is a matter of soul experience intuited by the poet and for which the reader must use intuition if he is to get at the real life and spirit represented by the artficed person or thing.¹ So we are told that

"(Along with every act—and speech is act—
There go a multitude impalpable
To ordinary human faculty,
The thoughts which give the act significance.
Who is a poet must needs apprehend
Alike both speech and thoughts which prompt to speak.
Part these, and thought withdraws to poetry:
Speech is reported in the newspaper.)" 2

Thought, we are informed elsewhere, is the soul of act, and it is the poet's business to disengage this soul from its body and then to represent it in art in less corporeally limited mediums. Verse is said to produce acts through thoughts alone and for the mind only, and if it were able to go a step farther and divest mind of thought then we should have God's unexpressed Will.³ And all this from Browning in order to say that the poet should discard external acts and most of the speech conventionally thought essential to poetic representations and should content his verse with the flashing thoughts, passions, and images that are really the wholes which issue in the fragmentary acts and words of men such as are usually held to be the proper materials of poetry.

A running summary of the theories as to the nature of a poet may serve best to bring into view Browning's whole notion of poetry. He holds poets to be keen observers of

1. *Sordello*, Dedication, 74 and III-100.

2. *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, IV-765.

3. *Sordello*, V-115.

life in all its phases and finds them afterward representing and interpreting what they observe in mediums whereby to render its whole nature more understandable to themselves and to their fellows.¹ They strive to find mediums in harmony with the thoughts and ideas which they wish to set forth, but these truths are their chief concern.² These truths they have gotten by their gift of genius whereby they see deeper and conceive more synthetically than their fellows, consequently they bring ideas always somewhat in advance of their age and not fully acceptable there, though these ideas are necessarily somewhat stamped with the seal of the age, too, since the artist himself is inevitably a creature of his own times. These ideas always come into acceptance gradually and in proportion as other men apprehend them and so rise into individual personalities in their own right, thereby attaining the poet's level at the time he conceived and bodied forth the ideas.³ The truths or ideas are out of the poet's own store of ideas, caught from the world about him, so necessarily have the seal of their times upon them to some extent, but they have still the stamp of the poet's own personality whose selections and syntheses from among many such ideas and truths they are. These truths of poetry do not report the whole nature of the poets who set them forth, for the poets are constantly growing in their stores of truths; nor do these ideas represent the particular and novel sides of the poets, but rather their inner essence which is the divine essence common to all humanity. Further, the representations of the poets show life to be cheerful and good, not melancholy and evil, and this no matter how strenuous a struggle with evil they find and show life to be; for their representations show the good and lasting to be always on the way

1. *How It Strikes a Contemporary*, 336.

2. *Epilogue to Pacchiarotto*, 827.

3. *Epilogue to Two Poets of Croisic*, 873.

to final conquest and the evil as only partial and always on the way to complete ultimate defeat.¹ Finally, poets have an ideal of life as a whole which they image in their art works, to which end they necessarily raise particular thoughts and ideas into universals or symbols of universals, and all this to the final end that they themselves and their fellowmen may become more and more individual personalities, at one with the divine essence which pervades all people and all things, and that they may thereby triumphantly approach the hereafter wherein all forms are transcended and all spirit is one in the absolute.² In this, way poets chronicle the stages of all life and are they whom God meant should help to save the world.³

Of poets there are two kinds according to their natures and their methods of gathering materials; namely, subjective or contemplative poets and objective or receptive poets. The characteristics of these two have been discussed in a previous chapter and need not be dwelt upon here. It is to be noted, however, that the impulses which set both kinds at work are the same and would answer to what is generally known in aesthetics as the "Stimulation and Repose" theory, though this is really a theory as to art appreciation rather than as to impulses toward art creation. Taken from the standpoint of what they do, what they give in their works,—our real concern here,—Browning discovers three kinds of poets: those who "Say they so have seen," those who report "What it was they saw," and those who "Impart the gift of seeing to the rest."⁴ He calls the poets of each kind, respectively,—epoists, analysts or dramatic poets, and synthesists or writers of

1. *At the Mermaid*, 807; *One Word More*, 361.

2. *Easter Day*, XXVIII-334.

3. *Pauline*, 10; *Paracelsus*, II-22.

4. *Sordello*, I-78. Cf. also *ibid.*, III-100, V-115, VI-124, and the *Essay on Shelley*, 1008 ff.

poems like his "Sordello" who combine somewhat the gatherings of both the objective and subjective poets in their works. It is in the role of dramatic synthesist that Browning seems to place himself, and his classification of himself with poets of this sort has a particular significance for aesthetics, for it offers a new view as to the nature of dramatic writing. To his theory concerning the drama and dramatic poetry, therefore, we shall need to give the remaining portion of our study of his theory on poetry.

It is a matter beyond question that Browning regarded drama as the highest form of poetic expression. What he meant by drama, however, is something different than the conventional stage play. In the beginning of his career, at any rate, he distinguishes clearly between the drama for the stage and the drama for the study. In the dedication to "Paracelsus" he announces that his purpose is to display the rise and progress of a character's mood or aspiration and that his performance is not to be mistaken for a regular drama. He then goes on to point out that in such an effort as his, in contrast to the regular drama, the "External machinery of incidents," the "Operation of persons and events," can be largely dispensed with and that here the "Phenomena of the mind or passions" can be directly presented.

When he came to write regular drama himself, however, Browning seems to have somewhat discarded his earlier differentiation, or at least to have carried over and applied to the regular drama, to some extent, the same principles previously applied only to the drama for the study. In his dedication to "Strafford" he declares his work to be one representing "Action in Character, rather than Character in Action," and his practice as well as his theory ever after manifested consistent adherence to the

belief that character, mind, and spirit, the whole phenomena of internal human activity, such as regular drama sets forth by a representation of external incidents, acts, and the interchange of ideas between characters, could best be portrayed by excluding all this external machinery save a minimum amount needed for a background and by employing directly what he calls "The incidents in the development of a soul," meaning the thoughts, feelings, motives, and aspirations of the character or characters used in the representations.

It is certain, of course, that there was no idea even here, on Browning's part, of enunciating principles applicable to the conventional drama of the stage, but it is no less certain, I am sure, that he did have a notion for a time that his principles might be such as would govern a new kind of stage production.¹ This position, too, he seems afterward to have abandoned, and his theory and practice throughout the greater part of his life indicates a quite consistent support of the new sort of drama spoken of in Mrs. Browning's "Aurora Leigh," a drama evidently intended for mental performance only, one which

" . . . Peradventure may outgrow
The simulation of the painted scene,
Boards, actors, prompters, gaslight, and costume;
And take for a nobler stage the soul itself,
Its shifting fancies and celestial lights,
With all its grand orchestral silences,
To keep the pauses of its rhythmic sounds." ²

At any rate, the poet was tired of writing for the stage as early as 1846 and forever after persisted in writing a form of drama closely corresponding to that described by Mrs. Browning.

The new form of dramatic poetry almost uniformly employed by the poet after 1846, and the form in which all but

1. Cf. esp. the Dedication to *Pippa Passes*, 128.

2. Mrs. Browning: *Aurora Leigh*, Book V.

a half dozen or so of his earlier pieces were cast, is the now well-known dramatic monologue, or monodrama. If he cannot be credited with inventing this form he is still to be given credit for modifying, improving, and bringing into general recognition a form of dramatic writing little known before his time and extensively exercised since then. His theory concerning this form, therefore, is of considerable importance to the aesthetics of the drama. In determining this theory further than the previous quotations and references have enabled us to do, the first definite pronouncement for our attention is that of the advertisement for the third number of "Bells and Pomegranates" in which he says that a majority of the Dramatic Lyrics in the collection "Might also come properly enough . . . under the head of Dramatic Pieces; being, though often lyric in expression, always Dramatic in principle, and so many utterances of so many imaginary persons, not mine."¹ In the introduction to the 1867 collected edition of his works he includes "Pauline" in the above classification and goes on to say that he has written this sort of poetry since then "According to a scheme less extravagant and scale less impracticable."² If we further qualify these pronouncements by the lines of "One Word More,"—

"Love, you saw me gather men and women,
Live or dead or fashioned by my fancy,
Enter each and all, and use their service,
Speak from every mouth,—the speech, a poem." ³

we then have before us a fairly accurate general impression of the dramatic poem of Browning's conception.

The chief concern of dramatic poetry was, as Browning believed, the representation of "The incidents in the development of a soul," and he believed the dramatic mono-

1. Advertisement to Dramatic Lyrics, 163.

2. Pauline, 1. Cf. also Parrott: The Non-Dramatic Poems, 26.

3. One Word More, 363.

logue the form best suited to this end. The end was the revelation of character, of thoughts, passions, motives, the spirit life of man, and the poet thought these things could best be presented directly in the dramatic poem by catching and representing the character in a sort of confessional monologue indulged at some high critical moment of life. The pose and utterances of such a moment he declares to be fit representatives of the character's whole life, its whole aspiration and progress, nay more, fit representatives of all human nature and life, for in their climactic moments men seem to rise above the limitations of forms and circumstances and to stand forth for what they are, embodied portions of the divine essence.¹

Such a drama as Browning writes and justifies in his theory is necessarily one that observes quite closely the classical unities, not on the ground of abstract requirements, but because of its very nature, for it represents only a moment in a character's life, a single experience that could occur only in one small range of time, at one place, and involve only a very closely unified action, and it has to do primarily with the internal mental and spiritual doings of the given time and place. It is a drama of the soul, of individual personality, caught at a moment such as so manifests its essential humanity that the representation of the soul at this moment is representative at once of the soul's whole process of development and of the development of the human spirit generally. The representation of such a moment obviously imposes all the unities upon dramatic poetry of the sort here in question.²

The characters of such drama are few in number. Usually there is only one that is actually to be characterized, and if a longer poem of the sort is attempted it will be divided

1. *Sordello*, V-116; *Luria*, V-313.

2. *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, Vol. II-86.

into parts with one character's development to be the primary concern of each part. The characters will always be shown as divided personalities to some extent, too, since the dramatic struggle always goes on within individual souls, never between several characters or between character and outside forces, except as these are subordinate concomitants of the inner struggle.¹ The characters need not be high and noble personages, for the peasant serves as well as the king to show the essential nature and process of human life.² They may speak and show their own thoughts and passions, or they may be made to speak and show the thoughts and passions of the poet who creates them, or of other men, but in any case they speak for and represent human nature and human life as a whole. Such are the characters of dramatic poetry as Browning conceives them.

The difference between comedy and tragedy pointed out in "Aristophanes' Apology" indicates to some extent Browning's own views on the matter, but the subject is too complicated for full discussion here. We may content ourselves with noting that a modern drama is mentioned in which there is a combination of comedy and tragedy,³ a characteristic of modern drama specifically pointed out by the romantic aestheticians before Browning. A study of other works in connection with the one here named will also convince us that the dramatic struggle, as represented by Browning, is always the struggle of the spirit to be true to a loyalty to some person, or cause, or ideal, always an aspiration within the individual soul in any case, and against the limitations imposed by the individual's own form and by the outward forms in the way of circumstances

1. Bagehot: *Pure, Ornate, and Grotesque Art*, 373.

2. *Sordello*, III-98.

3. *Aristophanes' Apology*, 647 and 659.

and institutions. This struggle constitutes the material of drama,—of comedy and tragedy both, — for it is a struggle such as this that constitutes the whole of human life. The struggle merely becomes comic or tragic as one sees it from the standpoint of the freedom attained by spirit over forms or from the standpoint of the limitations suffered. It is safe to say, too, that for Browning the two aspects are always combined to some extent in any great modern dramatic poem.¹

The above-mentioned views may be further confirmed by taking note, so far as one can, of the nature of Fate in Browning's description. In the modern world Fate is always an inner Nemesis of some sort rather than an outer force imposed by the Gods, as in the case of the Greeks. For Browning the inner struggle is directed against the earthly forms which cramp and hinder the spirit from self-expansion and from piercing to oneness with spirit manifestations outside itself, so the struggle is chiefly from within and against the spirit's own embodiment limitations. The form antagonist here may be thought of as Fate, and in this sense Fate becomes very much the sort of thing it was for Schopenhauer, the original and inherent sin and evil of the world and life generally. The significant difference between Schopenhauer's and Browning's views is that for the latter there is always the possibility of a constant partial escape from the evil of form limitations and a constant partial triumph of the spirit over its antagonistic Fate. Even in physical death, then, if the spirit has made progress by holding to and striving for its loyalties, causes, and ideals, even in death under such circumstances fate is entirely vanquished and a Djabal,

1. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, 688; *A Light Woman*, 267; and Aristophanes' *Apology*, 642.

for instance, can renounce life with the triumphant declaration of a victor,—

“ . . . I am out of reach of fate;
No further evil waits me. Speak the doom!”¹

I have attempted in the brief survey just completed to give some idea of Browning's theories concerning poetry and especially poetry of the dramatic sort. Limitations of space and ability may have prevented an altogether satisfactory general survey, even, of what is a very complex and much discussed subject in the poet's works, but I believe the general outlines of his theory to be as here reported. However we may disagree with the theories as to poetry and drama, as described in this report, they are still significant theories for modern aesthetics. They are theories that grew naturally out of the theories on poetry and drama current in the quarter century before Browning began his work, and they are theories, without doubt, that are to a considerable extent the products of their age, however much one still insists that they are theories peculiar to and begotten by the special dramatic powers of their author. The times, at any rate, were not yet ready for a regular drama that would bring “A supply of the fresh and living swathe; getting at new substance by breaking up the assumed wholes into parts of independent and unclassed value,”² so a dramatically gifted Browning could only attempt a substitute, a modification of the regular drama, that might serve instead. This is not the whole of the matter, however, for, besides the peculiar dramatic gifts of the poet and the unpropitiousness of the age for regular drama, there remains still to be mentioned the supreme factor in accounting for his dramatic theory and practice, namely, his philosophy of life. When one has

1. *The Return of the Druses*, V-214.

2. *Essay on Shelley*, 1010.

said that the nature of life as Browning conceived it was such as could best be represented by the sort of drama he wrote and the sort of drama that he made the subject of his dramatic theory, then one has accounted for the poet's practice and his theory in a way such as he himself might have used and after a fashion that the facts of the case themselves seem to require.¹

·III. Music.

The group of Browning's poems dealing specifically with music and many passages on music in others of his works afford a quite complete theory on the subject, and one quite generally in agreement with that of the modern aestheticians preceding him.² Music, as was heretofore pointed out, is the highest of the arts in his classification, on the ground of its supreme capacity for the revelation of spirit or meaning. In music form is so perfected in transparency and so subordinated to the manifestation of the art content that content alone is attended. Music is

" No new impulse, but the one
With which all others best could be combined."

" . . . Earnest of a heaven,
Secing we know emotions strange by it,
Not else to be revealed." 3

When he has compassed all things possible by means of the other arts, then, Aprile declares,

" . ' . To perfect and consummate all
Even as a luminous haze links star to star,
I would supply all chasms with music, breathing
Mysterious emotions of the soul, no way
To be defined save in strange melodies." 4

Music is found less permanent than poetry in its trans-

1. Cf. works listed under "Drama" in the Bibliography.

2. Chapter I, Section 5E, above.

3. Pauline, 5.

4. Paracelsus, II-23.

cendence of laws and forms, but it attains farther in this transcendence through momentary flashes of spiritual truths and it is for this reason, on his own basis of rating, that Browning is obliged to give it higher place even than his own art. For the more definite thought side of truth man must fall back upon words, but for the fleeting emotional side and its images whereby to flash at once the whole process of life, evil and good, perfection in imperfection, in higher reaches and in the interstices that all the other arts fall short of, for this music alone will serve. So Elvire's husband appeals last to music, on the ground that

"Thought hankers after speech, while no speech may evince
Feeling like music,—mine, o'erburdened with each gift
From every visitant, at last resolved to shift
Its burden to the back of some musician dead
And gone, who feeling once what I feel now, instead
Of words, sought sounds, and saved forever, in the same,
Truth that escapes prose,—nay, puts poetry to shame." ¹

In music the form seems altogether transcended by content, the mind seems altogether divested of formulated thought, and so "God's unexpressed Will" seems to be attained. This is the special message of "Abt Vogler" wherein the improvising musician is supposed to utter this rhapsodic and yet reasoned judgment on music,

" . . . For think, had I painted the whole,
Why there it had stood, to see, nor the process so wonder-worth:
Had I written the same, made verse—still, effect proceeds from cause,
Ye know why the forms are fair, ye hear how the tale is told:
It is all triumphant art, but art in obedience to laws,

But here is the finger of of God, a flash of the will that can
Existent behind all laws, that made them and lo, they are!
And I know not if, save in this, such a gift be allowed to man,
That out of three sounds he frame, not a fourth sound, but a star." ²

This passage and the previous reference to music as an art that attains to God's unexpressed will show that Browning,

1. *Fifine at the Fair*, LXI-716.

2. *Abt Vogler*, 383.

like Schopenhauer, believes that music represents the will directly without the intermediation of formulated ideas. Music is able to do this because it represents what may be felt but not thought. It fills the chasms otherwise unknown that lie beyond thought, for the reason that its rhythms are "Direct resemblances of emotions, that is, without making the circuit of reference to anything which had a name and existence in the external world."¹ In music more than any other art, too, time and space seem lost out along with all causal relations and one for the moment seems to attain to the absolute itself.²

In the comparison of music to architecture, again, Browning is in agreement with Schopenhauer.³ In several poems this comparison is a matter of comment and it is clear from his description of the effects of music that Browning finds its architectural analogies in its tonal and melodic structure. As art forms these structures are unapprehended in the experience of music, but their rise and fall, backward and forward movement, and their cycles to and from the tonic, dominant, and key note all set up associative ideas that suggest a building even while they image the process of life itself and the nature of the Divine, the

"Builder and maker of houses not made with hands!"⁴

His poems on music illustrate well how Browning continually insists that there must be form for art works, but form transcended, triumphed over, lost sight of, because of the high significance of the ideas, thoughts, or passions which comprise the content and which represent spirit striving, aspiring, and making progress against the antagonistic and limiting forms within which alone it has earth-

1. Mrs. Orr: *Handbook on Browning's Works*, 207.

2. Charles Avison, VIII-977.

3. Cf. Bosanquet: *Lectures on Aesthetics*, 53.

4. Abt Vogler, 383.

ly existence. In "A Toccata of Galuppi's," for example, it is shown that by its tones and melodies music starts up "A train of thoughts and images . . . that give the meaning of the music itself by interpreting the emotions in which it took its rise and to which appeal was made."¹ The same may be said of other poems and passages on music in Browning's works. In almost all his references to the art he shows by what particular tones and melodies and musical forms certain effects are gotten; but everywhere that the art is in reference the fact is brought clearly to attention, too, that the effects always tend to obscure entirely all consciousness on the part of the appreciator of music that certain definite forms are responsible for these effects. The emotionalized content has here attained complete ascendancy over the forms by which it is bodied forth.²

A study of the effects of music, effects indicated in the poems cited and in many another passage on musical art in the body of poetry under study, would no doubt further clarify the characteristics of the art already pointed out, but the mass of evidence could not all be presented, nor does a survey of the matter such as our purpose proposes require any such exhaustive presentation. For the purposes of a survey it is enough to have noted how the poet compared music to architecture, characterized it as a direct image of the will because of its subjective and emotional nature, and gave it highest place among the arts as a means of representing the process of life as a struggle, aspiration, and progress of the spirit toward freedom within and final transcendence over form. It is by discovering in it these characteristics that Browning finds music, above all the other arts, a means of imaging the nature and

1. Fotheringham: *Studies in the Mind and Art of Browning*, 433.

2. *Fifine at the Fair*, XL11-711.

process of life directly and as a whole. So the occasion of music above all other occasions becomes for him and for all men

“ . . . Just the time,
The place, the mood . . . when all things chime.”

Everyone who has appreciatively experienced music can say with him,—

“Clash forth life’s crimson chord, whence list how there ascend
Harmonics far and faint, till our perceptions end,—
Reverberated notes whence we construct the scale
Embracing what we know and feel and are!”

1

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1. *Fifine at the Fair*, LXII-716. On Music Cf. also *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, Vol. I-497, 589, 542, and Vol. II-81.

CHAPTER VI.

THEORIES AS TO THE APPRECIATION AND EFFECTS OF ART.

The appreciation of the beautiful is recognized by Browning, as it is by aestheticians almost without exception, to be potentially universal. He believes that everyone has more or less of the power and capacity to apprehend art truths and to receive artistic impressions. He declares that the artist's gift differs from that of his fellows only in degree, not in kind.¹ The distinction he makes is that the artist merely has the power of apprehending and receiving truths more intensely and in more prolonged periods and that because of this greater intensity and prolongation of the artistic perception the artist is able, as his fellows are not, to project and objectify his gleanings of truths into external objects such as we then characterize as art products. The great majority of human kind, meanwhile, have the same artistic impressions and conceptions, but for lack of the higher degree of artistic ability they stop short with appreciation; that is, they indulge artistic conceptions only within their own inner consciousness.²

It is necessary to remind ourselves here that those who create art works are also among those who appreciate them and secure their effects. If we then recollect also that Browning is concerned chiefly always with the individual personality, with the development of the individual soul, and with this soul development in its highest manifesta-

1. *Sordello*, V-115.

2. *Browning and Domett*, 126.

tions, why then we rather expect that the appreciations of art to which he will give his attention for the most part will be those of the highest type, the appreciations of the artists themselves. This, at any rate, is just the case. He gives much less attention to the appreciation and effects of art than to its production and the nature of its products, in the first place, and then what attention he does give the former subject he gives chiefly, as I have just said, to the appreciations and effects of art works among those who produce them. The appreciations and effects among men generally he considers secondary to those among artists, as we shall see further hereafter. Meanwhile, with this reservation in mind, we may proceed to investigate what he believes art appreciations and effects to be and in what ways he finds them operative.

1. The General Nature of Art Appreciation and Effects.

The obvious fact that all art appreciations must begin in sense experience is frequently pointed out in the poet's works. Whatever appeals art makes he regards as appeals to soul through sense.¹ This is to indicate already that the sense experience alone is not, in his opinion, a complete art appreciation and that the sense experience alone will not give the valid effects to be expected from art works. The genuine appreciator of art merely begins with sense stimulation, he never stops there but always goes on to the employment of all his faculties. The intellectual, emotional, and imaginative, as well as sense faculties, must be in operation for full aesthetic appreciation.² He implies, further, that the faculties of man are such that they practically impel him to appreciations of the beautiful in some form or other, in a greater or less degree of in-

1. *Easter Day*, XXVIII-334.

2. *Ferishtah's Fancies*, VIII-938.

tensity, and more or less frequently, according to his nature. Due to this fact the appreciations of art must be potentially universal among men, and due to this fact, too, artists always produce their works with the end in view of reaching a wide circle of appreciation, however much their primary concern is always still with the effects their artistry may have upon themselves. So even so ascetic an artist as *Pictor Ignotus* is given his dreams,

"Of going—I, in each new picture,—forth
As, making new hearts beat and bosoms swell,
To Pope or Kaiser, East, West, South, or North,

Through old streets named afresh from the event,
Till it reach home, where learned age should greet
My face, and youth, the star not yet extinct
Above his hair, lie learning at my feet!" 1

Men's faculties differ, however, so not all works of art are appreciated by all men, nor do all works that are appreciated by any group of men receive equal appreciation from all members of the group. The audience, consequently, becomes an important secondary consideration for every producing artist. But with respect to the audience the chief concern should be to bring the highest effects possible to a fit audience,—this necessarily a select one,—and not to bring merely what will achieve for the artist the greatest fame and financial reward, for to produce art for the latter ends is merely to traffic in art. It misses the proper effects, this trafficking, since it makes possession rather than appreciation the occasion for art experience.²

Browning's own artistic efforts were put forth confessedly, for the most part, for a select circle of appreciators.³ Whether or not this was due to inability on his part to do

1. *Pictor Ignotus*, 341.

2. *Fifine at the Fair*, XXXVI-710.

3. *Advertisement to Pippa Passes*, 128.

works that would reach a larger circle, and though the point is one of criticism rather than of aesthetics, in any case the fact still indicates a notion on his part that art should be produced with a definite circle of appreciators and a definite range of effects in mind. The world's profit, not the world's praise, is to be sought, and only through those able to apprehend the truths mediated in the artist's individual way can this profit come.¹ And then proportionately as the artist's works bring benefits of the sort indicated to a wide circle of appreciators, in this degree are they a benefit, as they need always primarily to be, to the artist himself.

We observe, then, that the appreciation and effects of art are held to begin with the senses and to extend to all the faculties of experience, that they are thought to be potentially universal, and that each artist, in his life work and especially in each art product, is limited in the extent of appreciation and effects he can attain. Accordingly we find it believed that every artist tends somewhat to select his audience and to work toward something less than the whole range of appreciations and effects, although striving always for as full a range as his powers can compass.

Art appreciation is further characterized as a distinct act and effort on the part of the appreciator, and the latter is held to have a creative role in a way, too, for the creative conceptual process of the artist must be gone through with again in every genuine appreciation of art. Though the recreated conceptions of art appreciations are not bodied forth in art products when experienced by one not an artist, they are still always stored within the appreciator, whoever he may be, as a gain to his soul, as something new to add to and modify his ideas concerning the world and its life. Further, men want and have a right

1. Ferishtah's Fancies, XII-946.

to expect imaged and emotionalized thoughts from the sense experience of art, rather than mere formulated thoughts and reasonings.¹ All men have fancies, whether they are artists or not, and those who are not artistically gifted find truths disengaged from their natural embodiments and given greater accessibility in art works, truths often too recondite in these natural embodiments for their slower fancies to apprehend.² And yet, to find these truths even in art works, the appreciators must indulge the same process as that by which the artist himself first apprehended the truths in nature and man, the same process as that by which the artist conceives his own works and appreciates them himself afterwards. The appreciators, too, must

"Enter, spark-like, put old powers to play,
Push lines out to the limit, lead forth last
(By a moonrise through a ruin of a crypt)
What shall be mistily seen, murmuringly heard,
Mistakenly felt:" 3

Beyond the senses, and far more than the senses, the intuitive powers are at work in art appreciation. The process is, therefore, unexplainable, just as the artist's process itself is unexplainable. Unacknowledged powers are at work, or rather, all the powers are at work at once, and man cannot understand so complex a thing as this combined operation of all his faculties.⁴ All one seems to know of the matter is that emotions are aroused, the imaginative powers are put into action, and the intellect is set to work. Somehow the art brings one to facts by the way of fancies.⁵ Associative ideas arise. The one sense directly appealed to sets the other senses into activity, and the appreciator seems to find his whole being responding

1. Transcendentalism, 336.

2. Sordello, II-85.

3. The Ring and the Book, I-421.

4. The Ring and the Book, X-567.

5. Christopher Smart, I-959.

to the work before him. But all comes as a thrill and a trance-like effect because emotions that are moving and fleeting are a part of the experience. Yet images are formed, too, and the intellect is busy at storing up some residue from the experience, so there is always something that still remains with the appreciator after the momentary first flash that characterizes all art experience is gone.¹

Effects like those from art may be experienced more or less in nature and man, too, when truths or ideas concerning life are apprehended intuitively with all the faculties.² Art is merely a means of assisting those less keen in apprehensive powers to the flashes of truths concerning life in its many manifestations. Art can so assist because it renders these truths more accessible to the common intelligence by the use of more transparent mediums than those in which natural and human life are actually embodied. In either case, however, the momentary flashes are taken up by all the faculties and report is made as to the meaning of the objects observed, whether these be the objects themselves or only representations such as art offers. One enjoys art and gets instruction, too, as from the natural world, for the whole meaning of the universe and its life comes to him in his aesthetic experiences. And he finds art even more enjoyable and more instructive than nature and man, for the revelation of life's nature and process is more accessible and more clear here than in the actual world.

In art appreciation, however, one needs to be on guard against taking the thing represented for the actual object, for to do this is to lose the aesthetic experience and to take the practical attitude which loses one the pleasure found in the beautiful. In the practical attitude some of

1. *The Ring and the Book*, VIII-517.

2. *Natural Magic*, 811; *Ferishtah's Fancies*, X-940.

the faculties are at once subdued and one gets empirical experience rather than the intuitive full experience that is essential for aesthetic appreciation.¹ One cannot analyze an art work empirically, in art appreciation, but must take its flash of truth as from something beyond the actual empirical object which the art work represents. Because of this the art appreciator is always able to say with Elvire's husband,—

“ Art is my evidence
That something was, is, might be; but no more the thing itself,
Than flame is fuel. Once the verse-book laid on shelf,
The picture turned to wall, the music fled from ear,—
Each beauty, born of each, grows clearer and more clear,
Mine henceforth, ever mine!”

2

But he is always constrained to add, too, relative to explaining how all this is possible, that

“ If I would retrace
Effect in Art, to cause,—corroborate, erase
What's right or wrong i' the lines, test fancy in my brain
By fact which gave it birth? I re-peruse in vain. . . . ”

3

All in the art work is there half-real, the spectator himself less than real, too,

“In a dream, lethargic kind of death in life,
That helps the interchange of natures, flesh
Transfused by souls, ”

4

The art work must be accepted for what it is, only a representation of things whereby to image and symbolize the process of life. So viewing it anyone and everyone may in some degree apprehend in it flashes of truths, provided that he brings all his faculties to the experience, and may thereby find his conception of the world and its life correspondingly enlarged.

1. *Fifine at the Fair*, LXXXV-723.

2. *ibid.*, XLI-711.

3. *ibid.*, XLII-711.

4. *Sludge, the Medium*, 411.

2. Objectification as a Method of Appreciation.

The process of art appreciation is one of apprehension of truth and its satisfactions come from the discovery of a life like the appreciator's own in the external art object under observation. As the romanticist aestheticians early pointed out, this is just the anthropomorphic interpretation of things in its application to art interpretation, and the explanation of the process constitutes what some have called the *Einfühlung* and others the Objectification theory of art appreciation.¹ Browning uses neither of these terms, directly, but his description of the process of art appreciation is such as to make them both applicable. He calls the arts "Mediators, messengers, projected from the soul to go and feel for Her, out there"² He professes to have lived with the Homeric gods and men as he read the story of 'Troy.'³ He believes the process of art appreciation to be an exact duplicate of that whereby artists apprehend the truths they use in their works, a process wherein

" . . . They are fain invest
The lifeless thing with life from their own soul." ⁴

In art appreciation he finds men seeming to leave themselves and stamping themselves upon something external. The life "out there" may seem to come to meet one's own too, to be sure, and it does seem afterward to dwell within those who have once apprehended it, but these are secondary and tertiary effects. The first flash of the aesthetic appreciation is rather a feeling of objectifying oneself, of going out and feeling into the object in which the truths are apprehended. The *Einfühlung* theory that began with Herder and that has since been called the Objectification

1. Cf. Chapter I, Section 6B, above.

2. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-542.

3. Pauline, 5.

4. Sordello, I-79.

theory by many aestheticians has been accepted by Browning, then, as a means of explaining the first effects in the appreciative process.¹

3. Criticism, Judgment, and Taste.

Among the appreciators of art there are always some who set up, or are set up, as critics and who are supposed to be able to judge particular works by the standard of definite aesthetic theories and principles. To a greater or less extent, according to their inclinations and abilities, these critics take upon themselves the interpretation of art works to their fellows. They are intermediaries between art works and men generally, just as artists themselves are intermediaries between nature and humanity on the one hand, and the less keen apprehensive powers of common men, on the other. But these secondary intermediaries are a useless and pestiferous group, in Browning's opinion, a group that does little but feed upon and pester the real artists.² He found them of no use, to begin with, for he insisted upon every man's working out his own salvation and so he required every man to find his own flashes of truth. Art works themselves he considered only a means to assist men of less keen apprehensive powers in learning to apprehend for themselves the truths concerning life in nature and man. To depend upon the critics evidently seemed to him only a shifting of the responsibility such as would prevent men from ever acquiring the apprehensive powers in their own right. Further, too, he believed the truths of art to be apprehensible only by intuition, consequently the analyses and the formulated interpretations of the critics could, in his opinion, be of no assistance to a true appreciation, since they employed

1. *Fifine at the Fair*, LII-713.

2. *Sordello*, I-75.

only the empirical methods. The critic's methods are, in fact, a bar to genuine appreciation, for he brings preconceived notions as to what ought to be apprehended in art works and so applies empirical reasoning processes to what can be truly appreciated and can truly render its effects only by intuitive methods.¹ The critic lacks especially the emotional and imaginative faculties, and so fails to bring all the faculties essential to a full aesthetic appreciation.² So far as any critic is needed, so Browning declares as a final word on the subject, the artist needs always to be his own critic and beyond that each appreciator of art must go to the art works at first hand and must bring to them the artist's gift of intuitive insight, for no mere critical analysis will ever attain for him the truths that lie in art only for the soul's apprehension.³

The judgment of art works seems to be explained by Browning, in what little he has to say on the subject, as a sort of secondary operation following the objectification process. The latter process, as we have seen, was a sort of objectifying of the appreciator's self into the art object by which he seemed to apprehend there the flashes of truth as to life which make up the immediate first experience in the presence of such works. The judging process is treated rather as a subjective one which follows this and as one by which the appreciator estimates the truths thus apprehended and builds them into his permanent store in their fit places⁴ The judgments are measurements of the meanings or truths rather than of the formal aspects of art works.⁵ For the judging process, further, the appreciator finds it necessary to withdraw somewhat from the first mo-

1. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau, 685.

2. Pacchiarotto, XXIV-806.

3. Sordello, II-91.

4. *Fifine at the Fair*, XLI-711.

5. Filippo Baldinucci, 827.

ments of art experience, and must allow the truths carried away with him to there take their place among and stand comparison with the other truths already in his store.¹ These truths must take their place and stand comparison, then, with the truths apprehended in nature and man, too, and are not, therefore, strictly speaking, judgments of art at all. They are judgments rather of the truths themselves. The art works are really not to be judged, in Browning's opinion, as independent products; they are to be judged only as indications of spiritual progress, as indices of the progress of the producing artist in apprehending and revealing the truths, or, on the other hand, as at once helps and tests of the spiritual progress of the appreciators of art in apprehending truths for themselves. The standard, then, seems to lie in the producers and the appreciators rather than in any abstract rules or principles, and is a matter of spiritual development rather than of formal or otherwise explainable qualities. There is too little said upon the subject, however, to speak dogmatically in reviewing it, and we can only say that Browning's opinions seem to be approximately those we have here set forth.²

Taste is a subject, too, that is without any very clear definition or explanation in the poet's works. If by taste is meant a developed set of principles in the individual to be used as a standard for his judgments of art works, then it may be said at once that our poet finds no place for taste in art appreciation. For him, as for his wife, art appreciation is not a thing for taste in this sense, but rather a matter for insight and the intuitive powers.³ A cultured taste might be thought of as the sort of thing operative afterward in the judging process which compares and gives the

1. Paracelsus, III-28.

2. Cf. Alexander: *Introduction to Browning*, 110.

3. *Letters of R. B. and E. B. B.*, Vol. I-321.

truths apprehended their fit place among one's store of truths gleaned from all sources; but this, after all, is not really an appreciation of the art work itself, but rather a valuation of truths with reference to the spiritual progress of artists and appreciators.

But the term taste is used at places in Browning's works to signify just that intuitive power by which every man is more or less gifted for finding flashes of truths in nature and man as well as in art works. So far as the poet uses the term in this sense he finds that every man has his own taste, for the most part.¹ Attempts to discipline a taste of this sort and to apply standards merely disturb the unexplainable intuitive process, for taste of this sort is just the power of genius itself which gets at truths by means for the explanation of which there are no rules.² "Intelligence, by itself," he declares, "is scarcely the thing with respect to a new book—as Wordsworth says (a little altered) 'you must like it before it be worth your liking'".³ The real manifestation of taste is just the appreciator's objectification of his own life and feeling into the art product whereby he finds a life like his own "out there." In every case, then, the nature of the appreciator's own being will determine the nature of what he apprehends. That is to say, the nature of the appreciator's own soul is at once also the determining agency for what he finds and what he likes in art; it is his taste.⁴ Just because his own soul is the immanent divine essence common to all mankind, however, a taste of the sort here described, while extremely individual, is at once also entirely universal, a conclusion which Browning himself does not make but which is inescapable when one considers his views on the matter other-

1. Cf. *De Gustibus*, 178; Donald, 911; and Rawdon Brown, 947.

2. Christopher Smart, II-959.

3. Letters from Browning, ed. by Wise, Vol. I-25.

4. *Fifine at the Fair*, LI-713.

wise, as the reader will appreciate from what has gone before.

4. The Effects of Art in General.

The effects of art which register upon spectators from their art appreciations have been variously described, but they are all quite generally characterized by the aestheticians as pleasures or satisfactions of some sort or other. Such effects are supposedly open to all men and it is in their generally accessible aspect that I wish, in the present section, to deal with certain specific pleasures or satisfactions from art pointed out in Browning's aesthetics.

A. Pleasure.

With the idea that art brings only an immediate pleasure, in the sense of a passing joy, the poet has no sympathy. He does not deny that art may bring such a pleasure, but he does not recognize such a pleasure alone, without some concomitant and more lasting satisfaction, to be a legitimate effect of art. Joy alone is not, for his philosophy, a proper thing for man to feed upon.¹ From art as from anything else of value he requires that man

“ . . . Seek the fruit of it
Not in enjoyment, proved a dream on earth,
But knowledge, useful for a second chance,
Another life. . . . ”

2

The proper pleasure from this standpoint is one that is mixed with pain, one that comes in connection with constant struggle and effort, a pleasure such as lies in aspiration and progress itself and rests at once upon what is already accomplished and upon what is yet to be achieved. Those who take only passing pleasures have not fulfilled

1. Rabbi Ben Ezra, 383.

2. Sludge, the Medium, 411.

the conditions of life's probation. They find themselves forever under obligation to confess that they have not

"Sighed deep, laughed free,
Starved, feasted, despaired,—been happy." ¹

Art works should really be equally potent in displeasing some people as in pleasing others, in the narrower sense of the term, if they are genuine works of art, and potent in displeasing all in some moments whom they please at other times. Whether they do so is a valid test of their effects, for the lasting pleasures such as art should bring have a displeasing side in the struggle and effort to which they impel one even while they please one, in different mood, by opposite appeal, through the glimpses of successes already attained which they afford. If they contain significant truths which, though apprehended in a flash, are still only relative truths after all and lead him who apprehends them a forever uncompleted search and struggle for full revelation,—only in this case are they works of art that have true and valid satisfactions.² Pleasures of this lasting sort are pleasures of the soul, not mere sense or bodily pleasures, and it is just these additional soul pleasures which art must afford if it is to have a part in the development of souls and be an instrument thereby toward the highest good.³ The appreciator of art can know no true and worth while pleasure from his art experience if he rests upon immediate satisfactions alone, but he must go on to the discovery of design and meaning in the thing represented and he will need to find back of all a representation of life itself in which life appears as it really is, a constant aspiration and progress in the midst of diminishing but unremitting limitations and difficulties.⁴ And each

1. *Youth and Art*, 396.

2. *The Ring and the Book*, X-568.

3. *Red Cotton Night-Cap Country*, III-759.

4. *Christopher Smart*, IX-960.

true pleasure from art is in itself also a partial death, for it contains at once what is attained and therefore dead, on the one hand, and also what is still to be achieved and therefore live truth.¹ It is in this all-inclusive sense only that Browning finds pleasure a valid effect of art.

B. Inspiration.

A general effect of art pointed out and given considerable validity even in its immediate and momentary aspects is that of inspiration. Time and again in his works the poets shows that the spontaneous and immediate apprehension of truths which comes in art experience is the starting point for new artistic creations. This is what he means by inspiration from art. To be sure, he finds in the flashes of truths from a study of man's soul at first hand the best starting point and source of inspiration for artists, but his practice and theory both acknowledge that art works sometimes serve better even than life itself to strike the spark which sets the creative imagination at work. A study of his many acknowledgments to the works of poets, painters, and musicians, especially, would show how much his inspiration came from art works, and these acknowledgments must be taken as significant commentaries for his theory. "The Guardian Angel" is a representative example. Here he confesses that a picture struck a thought from him which he then spread out and translated into song.² In like fashion he gives credit to other pictures and to songs and poems, to works of art of all sorts, for the flash of truth which set going his creative imagination and lead thereby to his own art products.

And this sort of thing is considered to be one of the most significant effects of art. The artists characterized

1. *Sordello*, VI-122.

2. *The Guardian Angel*, 195. Cf. also *Rephan*, 1003, et. al.

in his works are shown to be inspired by their own previous works or by those of other artists in a large number of cases. Inspiration is made so general a manifestation, in fact, that it must be taken to be a regular and practically essential effect of art. It is raised into a generally appreciated effect, too, for it is in their inspirational results that art works oftentimes lift the appreciators themselves to creative heights whereby they also are able to bring new good and new beauty into the world.¹ Not alone, then, do all artists feed upon one another,² but all men feed upon one another, and especially upon the work of artists; for a "Chorus-ending from Euripides" as well as a "Fancy from a flowerbell," or "Some one's death," is a flash of truth sufficient for

" . . . Fifty hopes and fears
As old and new at once as nature's self,
To rap and knock and enter in our soul,
Take hands and dance there, a fantastic ring." ³

and so inspire us to high living in some form or other, whether it leads to the production of art works or not.

C. Relief.

A further effect of art that is made much of by some aestheticians and that is duly recognized by Browning is that of relief. In its usual acceptance this relief effect from art appreciation is taken to be a sort of escape from the actual world with its cares and troublous passions to a state of quiet and repose. There are elements of this view in Browning's explanation of the matter, too, but for the most part he means by relief a sort of restorational and invigorating effect such as fits and impels one to plunge still more strenuously into life and to do battle more ef-

1. Balaustion's Adventure, 605.

2. Cf. Parker: Principles of Aesthetics, 43.

3. Bishop Blougram, 351.

fectively with the limitations and difficulties of living under earthly conditions. So he makes music the means of restoring Saul, of bringing the Duchess back again to the "will to live," and of diverting and soothing the troubled mind of Paracelsus. Likewise in the case of Sordello, from an artist's own artistic conceptions,

"Some sound or sight
Grew up, his own forever, to be fixed,
In rhyme, the beautiful, forever!—mixed
With his own life, unloosed when he should please,
Having it safe at hand, ready to ease
All pain, remove all trouble. . . . " 1

The arts generally are shown to have a relieving effect. Song is said to be a remedy for spleen-fits and a means for bringing content back to a distracted mind.² Even the artistry on the handles of his dagger is a diversion, at least, for the harrassed mind of a murderer.³ Everywhere the work of artists

"Makes amends
For the toiling and the moiling." 4

Everywhere appreciators of art find "Art's response to earth's despair."⁵

But the relief effect as Browning describes it is something more than a contented repose. Art, he says, brings its appreciators a relief because it brings them a triumph of the spirit. Art presents them a representation of the spirit triumphing over matter and form, but its representation shows the triumph always in the process and never completely attained. Accordingly, art is at once a relief in its vision of the degree of triumph achieved and a challenge also for further efforts whereby further triumphs may be seen and revealed. Thus it is that art brings us a

1. Sordello, II-85.

2. Aristophanes' Apology, 677.

3. A Forgiveness, 819.

4. Old Pictures in Florence, 176.

5. Christopher Smart, III-959.

sense of freedom even in the face of the "wall upon wall" of matter and form that hem us round and cramp our spirit growth. In this fashion it is a potent healer and a restorer of eagerness for life and its strenuous activities to those otherwise disposed to abandon the struggle.¹

Carrying this thought a bit farther, we find art thought of as a means of escaping the noise and dirt of the world and of attaining a realm of passion and ideas above and exempt from the passing distraction of time, place, and causality. In this role it seems to bear its appreciators to a veritable heaven apart from the low and petty affairs of everyday life, or, better still, to bring that realm of escape directly into the everyday world,

"Pouring heaven into this shut house of life." ²

Art works, by their high visions of truths that always fall more or less short of full revelation, are nevertheless a satisfying and relieving promise of greater revelations still to come on earth and of complete revelations to be enjoyed in the hereafter when the escape from all limitations is finally consummated. Accordingly, it may be said of all art, as Stratton says of Comedy, that it is the means whereby men,

"Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,
Reach fine form, the clear intelligence—
Above unseemliness, reach decent law,—
By laughter; attestation of the Muse
That low-and-ugly is not signed and sealed
Incontrovertibly man's portion here,
Or, if here,—why, still high-and-fair exists
In that ethereal realm where laughs our soul
Lift by the Muse." ³

5. The Effects of Art as Individual.

The appreciations and effects of art thus far discussed were thought by Browning to be potentially universal, but

1. *Flight of the Duchess*, XV-276.

2. *Transcendentalism*, 336.

3. *Aristophanes' Apology*, 540.

shared unequally by different men according to their inclinations and abilities. The most significant part of his theory on the matter is still to be noted and consists in the belief that the effects of art are individual rather than social experiences. Since he believes that the producing artists themselves get the effects of art works in a higher degree than other men and that the artists produce art works chiefly for their own benefit, an account of his views concerning the effects of art as individual will necessarily take note chiefly of these effects upon individual artists, though it will inevitably investigate also in what sense the effects upon men generally are considered to be individual rather than social.

It is here first our primary purpose, then, to note in what way these effects are considered to be individual in the artist's case. A key to the whole matter seems to lie in the line of "Sordello" where we are told that Sordello's own art "Developed his soul a thousand ways."¹ Thus it is clear that it is the first and greatest purpose of art to develop the artist's own soul. In producing his works the artist is exercising the gifts given him by God, working out thus his own probation, striving and making his progress in the triumph of spirit over matter; for the artist needs to achieve a progressive enfranchisement of his own spirit from limiting embodiments in order to apprehend and represent life everywhere as an enfranchisement like to his own. The means by which he sees past the concealing and cramping forms within which all life is manifested and gets at the true nature of the spirit dwelling there is itself a process of growth on his part. The projection and objectification of the truths he apprehends into the more transparent and revelational mediums of art are

1. *Sordello*, II-89.

still further means of growth for him, for these are processes that bring to him and his fellows a clearer vision and deeper understanding of just how life is a progressive struggle of the spirit toward freedom within matter and form. In the seeing soul that works constantly in this manner toward further visions and revelations of the spirit's triumph lies the highest worth, says Browning, and the art works executed in accordance with such ends are one of the artist's means to his constantly new and higher visions of this spirit triumph. His own art works, then, are really the artist's means for working out his own salvation. He realizes well that

"'Tis an awkward thing to play with soul,
And matter enough to save one's own." ¹

So he is concerned above all else to solve his own life's destiny and he

"Tries men and gods with
No problems for weak wits to solve meant
But one worth such author's evolvment." ²

The artist really knows only his own pleasures and pains and can deal with truths concerning life only from that standpoint.³ His works bring no mere passing pleasures, but only the lasting pleasures that are always half pain; for, while he is rendering plain how man's spirit may grow more and more conscious of man's life as a progress of the spirit in form, he is at the same time rendering clear also the need of such growth of consciousness and how limited such consciousness must ever be.⁴ Yet so far as he has made these things clear in his art, just so far has he perfected his own conscious soul in its powers and possibilities, for just so far has his own soul become able

1. *Fifine at the Fair*, LV-714.

2. *A Light Woman*, 267.

3. *La Saisiaz*, 857.

4. *Cleon*, 360.

to transcend and triumph over its own and all other limiting and concealing embodiments and to recognize the spirit life inhabiting everywhere in the form of immanent divine essence.¹

The artist's works are a pleasure, a relief, and an inspiration to himself first of all. Everywhere throughout his poems Browning shows artists continually spurred on by past efforts and successes to higher and more strenuous searchings for the truth and everywhere he shows them constantly attaining added satisfactions from progress made in the discovery and revelation of truths. The real test of their works he finds in the amount of such progress in themselves these works are indices of for the artists. And the thing seen and revealed is not the artist's own peculiar spirit life, but, so far as it is his own, it is the spirit life common to all. It is only as he rises above the particular self and finds and represents the thoughts and ideas that make up the life in himself to be the universal divine essence, it is only as he does this that he makes his progress and secures the proper effects for his art; for so he escapes somewhat the divided and partial nature imposed by embodiment limitations and becomes potentially a whole man, of a free spirit, able to live all the experiences possible to spirit in its earthly manifestation.² Thus always, as Whitman said, "The song is to the singer and comes back most to him." Of every true work of any genuine artist we may well say,

"This snatch or the other seemed to wind
Into a treasure, helped himself to find
A beauty in himself; for, see, he soared
By means of that mere snatch to many a hoard." ³

But other men experience the effects of art, as well as

1. Ferishtah's Fancies, XII-943.

2. Sordello, V-115.

3. Ibid., II-85.

the artists, and with them the effects are also individual. In his "Epitaph" for Thaxter's tomb the poet asks,

"Thou whom these eyes never saw! say friends true
Who say my soul, helped onward by my song,
Though all unwittingly, has helped thee too?"¹

Here is the point clearly put: the artists help themselves first and most, but all unwittingly they always help others too. As the appreciators of art apprehend the growth of truths in artists, manifested in art works, they catch glimpses of the nature of the process and gradually become able to emulate it to the extent of apprehending truths for themselves, thus growing in individual personality and soul power, approaching, according to the degree of their success, to the level of the artist or artists whose works first gave them impulse and guidance. Thus all men to some extent or other find assistance in soul growth from appreciations of the beautiful, whence the aesthetician is able to say truthfully, "All artists feed on one another and into each experience of art has gone the mind-work of the ages."²

To summarize, art derives its value from the fact that it is the result of the highest human endeavor on the part of the artist to develop himself and to represent to himself and accessible to others the understanding of spirit life as a growth. He speaks to mankind, not to man, for the truths about spirit life with which he deals are universal even though they must be apprehended by each man for himself individually. In proportion as men grow in the ability to so apprehend these truths and pass from the ability to apprehend them in art works to like ability in apprehending truths for themselves in all those less clear manifestations of life in earth's myriad natural and human

1. Epitaph, 940.

2. Parker: *Principles of Aesthetics*, 43.

forms, just to this degree do the appreciators of art rise to the status of individual personalities in their own right. Thus personality is developed by art, for in this fashion appreciators of art come more and more to realize their oneness with the immanent divine essence and their own potentialities for approaching the status of this transcendent essence. In their experiences with art both artists and appreciators alike work individually to apprehend, store, and reveal truths concerning the spirit life in form, the immanent essence in embodiments, in order that they may the better know that part of this essence which is within themselves and the better assist it in working toward a transcendence of its embodiments and a union with similar essence in that unembodied state wherein it is at once the absolute. Thus is the individual effect of art found perfectly compatible with and even contributory to its universal purpose.

6. The Effects of Art in Society.

Yet for all his stress upon the individual effects of art, as above indicated, Browning felt, as did the romanticist aestheticians before him, that art must somehow have effects that are for the good of society as a whole. He acknowledged that even the fullest and most complete individuality is still necessarily less than a whole man,¹ that "Collective man outstrips the individual."² He believes this to be a natural condition, however, one that cannot be remedied, and a condition that really increases rather than decreases with the spread of culture and civilization.³ If this is true, then the increased apprehension and storing of truths by art, which is one of the highest agencies of

1. Sordello, V-111.

2. *ibid.*, and pages ff.

3. Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, III-762; The Inn Album, IV-789.

culture and civilization, must inevitably increase the individuality and decrease the social interdependence of art appreciators. And this is exactly the position Browning takes with respect to the social effects and benefits of art. Art is not intended, in his opinion, to further man's social interdependence, but just the opposite. And just because he finds art promoting the growth of individuality and lessening the social dependence of its appreciators, for this reason Browning considers it the highest sort of agency for the good of society as a whole, for the highest and best conditioned society, as he sees it, is just that society which is made up of the most individual and independent personalities.

The views of Naddo, the critic, in "Sordello," are unquestionably the opposite of Browning's own on most points, and Naddo argues that poetry should try to please its readers by bringing them the calm and repose which he supposes they want from their art experiences. He advises Sordello never to try to rise above the intellectual level of his readers, but to strive rather to bring them only the common ideas current among the men of his times. He believes, in fine, that poetry should be just a pleasant sort of soothing agency for man's leisure social ends; that it should, in other words, promote the solidarity of the different social groups of different times and places. Sordello himself seems to be made somewhat uncertain as to just what he does believe, but his opinions are usually the opposite of Naddo's and represent those of Browning quite closely. His views and those of Browning, elsewhere expressed on the subject under discussion, are to the effect that art should attempt and demand the use of all the faculties of its producers and appreciators and that it should furnish those who use all their faculties upon it

a store of truths such as will enlarge and lift them above social dependence into a more complete and whole existence.

But this it not intended to require that art should be reformatory, specifically moral, or that it should incite to any definite act, event, or line of conduct.¹ It means merely that the poet believes the effects of art should be in the direction of enlarging the whole man through additions to his store of truths or ideas. The only reformatory effect there is to such an enlargement lies in the added capacity and potentiality the appreciator of art thereby attains with which to meet more sympathetically and understandingly any and all of the situations life brings. But this is not what is commonly known as reform; it is rather growth and development of individuality whereby past errors are avoided in the future because men have become individually able to cope more efficiently with all the problems of life. It is in the growth and development of such individualities among the appreciators that Browning believes art really fosters the good of society as a whole, for it is in this way that he finds a society promoted which is forever more and more composed of increasingly complete individuals, persons not dependent upon social helps in the usual way, but able to apprehend the truths of life everywhere for themselves. And such individuals he finds even more at one with each other than the members of the social groups of common conception, for such persons alone are able to apprehend and recognize the likeness of their own souls to one another because of the divine essence common to them all.

If more specific evidence is desired on the matter in discussion one can find lines and passages in considerable

1. At the *Mermaid*, 807; *Aristophanes' Apology*, 656.

array to show how, according to Browning, the artist brings truths concerning life in the past,¹ ideas of his own age concerning the nature of life,² and then, too, ideas as to the nature and process of life that are in advance of his own times.³ Always the seekers and revealers of truth, the artists high among them, are shown to be men who afford visions of truth such as will serve men of later times as vantage points from which to take outset to still new and higher truths. To every true artist one may say of his work that it gives the unborn generations their share and part in his being.⁴ Every true artist brings a contribution to his fellows that

"Holds the future fast,
Accepts the coming ages' duty,
Their present for this past." 5

Thus it is that every artist or seeker of the truth otherwise, however concerned primarily with his own salvation thereby, has still felt poignantly, too, the need of mediating truth to his fellows. Each of them must have said in his heart, ever and anon,

" 'Tis time
New hopes should animate the world, new light
Should dawn from new revealings to a race
Weighed down so long, forgotten so long! thus shall
The heaven reserved for us at last receive
Creatures whom no unwonted splendors blind,
But ardent to confront the uncouded blaze,
Whose beams not seldom blessed their pilgrimage,
Not seldom glorified their life below." 6

The views are somewhat humorously put by Pietro's disciple when he says to his master,—

"Grant me leave to make my kind wise, free, and happy! How?
Just by making me—as you are mine—their model!

1. *The Flight of the Duchess*, X-273.
2. *Sordello*, VI-121.
3. *Saul*, XIII-182.
4. *Saul*, XII-182.
5. *Popularity*, 195.
6. *Paracelsus*, I-15.

Geese have goose-thoughts: make a swan their teacher first; then
coadjutor,—

Let him introduce swan-notions to each noodle,—

Geese will soon grow swans and men become what I am now!" ¹

The artist, by the truths he reveals concerning the nature of life, provides in his works the models for the thought and spirit life of the appreciators of his art. He does not provide rules of conduct for them to follow. All worth lies in the seeing soul and only as the appreciators become seeing souls in their own right through the instrumentality of art has art served its proper function. As men rise to such levels all things become stuff for transmuting for them, and then man's breath everywhere evokes the beautiful. And the growth in truths is not here the slow accretional growth of science, but here truths come in flashes, to those who apprehend them in the world everywhere as well as to those who find them chiefly in art works. In all ages, though only intermittently, God seems to take things into his own hands and to give men what seems to be direct revelations of the nature of his essence in its immanent phase, and intermittently in all times, too, the common run of mankind get their glimpses through art, glimpses which gradually render them also competent to know themselves more and more allied to the common divine essence. Little by little, by a flash here and a flash there, artists first and most, but the appreciators of art to some degree too, grow in their apprehension of and oneness with the abiding humanity in all men, which is the divine essence everywhere immanent, an essence at once individual in its manifestation and universal in its all-pervasiveness.

Art works elevate the individuals until society tends to be composed entirely of such personalities that

1. *Pietro of Abano*, 900.

"A butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute!" ¹

All men come thus to rank more nearly with Caponsacchi, while those in the lead in the development still always have it said of them by their followers, that—

"Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of his light
For us i' the dark to rise by." ²

And always the leaders, the artists, bring to the appreciators of art a gift or bounty that

"So breeds
I' the heart and soul o' the taker, so transmutes
The man who only was a man before
That he grows god-like in his turn, can give
He also: share the poet's privilege,
Bring forth new good, new beauty, from the old." ³

Thus the appreciators of art sometimes even become artists because of the impulses and guidance for growth they have learned from their aesthetic experiences.

So in a constantly ascending scale the artists are forever sharing, spreading, and representing the divinity in themselves to all men. Thus on constantly higher levels the mediation of truths forever continues, while the appreciators of art thereby forever rise to that state of individuality wherein they also may share in the mediation. It is in this sense and this fashion that mediating and being mediated constitutes the whole higher life of man.⁴ It is in this high sense and worthy fashion, indeed, that in their appreciation and effects the works of art become mediators, for artists and appreciators alike, between the soul and the Infinite.⁵

1. Shop, 810.

2. The Ring and the Book, VII-525.

3. Balaustion's Adventure, 625.

4. Schlegel: Ideen, 12. Cf. also Firishtah's Fancies, XII-946.

5. Letters of R. B. and E. B. B., Vol. I-542.

CHAPTER VII.

RESUME AND CONCLUSION.

The proposed survey of Browning's aesthetic theories is now completed. A comparison of these theories with those of the modern aestheticians preceding Browning has been promised and is necessary if one is to determine in what ways and at what points, if at all, our poet has contributed to the theories on art current before his works appeared. Further, too, something in the way of a criticism of his theories will need to be attempted if his work in this field is to be rated among the many contributions which make up aesthetics. To a very summary performance of these two tasks we properly commit ourselves in closing our study, for in presenting such a comparison and criticism we shall inevitably have to do continually with Browning's chief theories and with what and where he has contributed something of value for the appreciation and understanding of art, — fit matters, these, for rounding out and concluding the report we have had in hand.

1. A Comparison of Browning's Aesthetics With That of the Romantic Aestheticians Before Him.

Many of the points of comparison here in question have been pointed out in the course of my study and only the most important of these will be cited and commented upon at this time. Others of these points are too much a matter of detail to be included in a general survey such as I pretend to offer. In any case, I wish here to point out

only the general likenesses and differences between the two bodies of aesthetics and then briefly to indicate where and in what ways Browning's theories seem to fall markedly short of or to make significant advances upon those of his predecessors.

A. General Likenesses and Differences.

In general Browning's aesthetics is one that lacks the systematisations evident in the previous modern aesthetics, whether the latter be taken as a whole or in the parts contributed by the various individual aestheticians. This is due, of course, to the fact that Browning nowhere attempts a systematic prose or poetic work altogether given to art theories such as every one of his predecessors with whom we have had to do some time or other indulged. Nevertheless, in a fragmentary way throughout his poetry, his letters, and his snatches of prose for dedicational and other purposes, he does offer more or less complete theories on nearly all phases of art explained in the systematic accounts of the earlier men. It is this fact especially, and the likeness of these theories to those of the systematic accounts, too, which convince one that the poet knew the modern art theories current before and during his poetic career and that he drew largely upon them, both for the principles of art to which he gives expression and for those upon which his own artistic practice is based. Except for its lack of system and for certain important differences heretofore or directly to be noted his theories are very closely in agreement with those of the founders of modern romantic aesthetics.

Like that of his predecessors, his aesthetics is for the most part a decidedly idealistic and romantic one. It differs a bit, however, in that it attempts, more than theirs, to find a realistic and practical basis as well as an idealistic

one for the explanation of art. It is, like the poet's philosophy, a real-idealistic body of theory, and it seems at times to give expression to more practical and definitely applicable principles than the great aestheticians themselves were able to formulate. It must be conceded that it has, on the other hand, notably in its *Cycle* and *Transcendence of Form* theories, some of the most impracticable and inapplicable principles to be found anywhere in all aesthetics. These are few, however, and, by the large and so far as it goes, his aesthetics still offers a somewhat more practical working basis for the explanation and understanding of art than was current before he began his work.

Finally, his aesthetics as a whole gives far more attention to the artist and art production and far less attention to the appreciators of art and art effects than is done by the romanticists otherwise, either individually or as a group. Unlike the other romanticists he believes that the first and highest purpose and good of art is just the service it renders artists themselves. Most romanticists agree that art has this function, too, but they insist that art brings like benefits and to an equal, if not even greater, degree to the appreciators of art generally; for it is just the common man who is less able to apprehend the truths of life otherwise that they find most in need of the service art is able to render. Even admitting the truth of their observations, Browning still requires that the functioning of art among men generally must always be only a secondary end for the artist, for unless the artist works primarily towards his own development and salvation, he is soon equalled by those who benefit by his services and so ceases to be of further use or significance. It is for this reason that the poet puts his stress in aesthetics so much more upon the artist and his work than upon the appreciation and effects of art, and that even where he does deal with

the latter subject he does so primarily from the standpoint of the artists who produce the works under appreciation.

B. A Comparison of Theories Relative to the Artist.

The purposes of the comparison between Browning's views and those of his predecessors concerning the artist promise best to be served by a rapid review of the outstanding differences. Where his precursors generally look upon the artist as "a Brahmin of a higher caste," one requiring a separate and distinct outer life as he has an inner one peculiarly different from the common run, Browning meanwhile declares that this gifted creature is different from his fellows only in degree, not in kind, and that he needs to live a normal social life among them to serve best his high ends. Paradoxically, however, Browning believes, in contrast to those who preceded him, that the artist so lives and carries out his high aims first and chiefly for self-development rather than for the good of those fellow beings among whom he must carry on his work.

Far more closely than the romanticists generally our poet tends to identify human personality with the art truths, or materials of art, though such an identification, rather than expressed, is implicit in the nature of development and the qualities he assigns to these things. For him the development of character comes by constant increase of one's store of truths: and art content being just these truths objectified again into external mediums, it follows that art content is at once also human personality, so far at least as truths thus objectified from the store that makes up one's personality can be said to carry the qualities of personality out with them. Personality being, for the purposes in question, the common divine essence of humanity, it is obvious that this "carrying out" of person-

ality into art mediums is capable of attainment to a very considerable extent. But of all this, and the identification of personality and art content which it signifies, I find very little in the aesthetic forerunners of Browning and as I have said, no direct statement but much clear implication in Browning's works.

Further, the aesthetics of our poet puts far less significance upon the actual process of art production and far more upon the artistic conception process than is done by the earlier aesthetics. The real point at issue here seems to be that the poet separates and differentiates more than his predecessors between the apprehending, conceiving, and executing stages or phases of the whole art process and is thereby enabled to think of the executing process as largely a mechanical and technical performance, a sort of structural routine concerned with the name and habitation of the artistic creation, but without any appreciable share in the origin and essential nature of the thing. One feels instinctively that the poet goes somewhat too far in this direction and that his predecessors are on more tenable ground when they consider the art process to be a whole and a thing whose every stage and phase requires something, at least, of all the high gifts and faculties of the artist.

As regards the special gifts and faculties of the artist there are no significant differences of opinion to report. But the situation is otherwise where the theories on the attitudes of the artist and his creativeness are in question. Concerning the ironic attitude Browning agrees with the romanticists that the artist is superior to any and all of his materials and products, but he disagrees with them in his denying that this superiority in any way frees one from being held accountable for the use made and attitude taken toward these materials and products; for in his opinion

this superiority is one of degree, not of kind, and instead of giving one separateness and aloofness it rather binds one to an interminable quest for the discovery and revelation of the essential oneness of all his materials, his products, and himself. In his practice, however, as previously pointed out, the poet often supports the Romantic Irony theory in its extreme form and stands aloof to exult in his powers and sport with his materials and products as though they were mere puppets for his irresponsible, play-time moods. Happily this is not often nor continuously enough to make the practice seem a defensible theory on his part, as it was to Schlegel and his followers among the earlier aestheticians.

In the case of the Play Theory the poet has too little to say to make any comparison possible further than this, that in common with a considerable number of romanticists he does find the play spirit identical with that of the artist in many respects. But there is no Play Theory corresponding to that of Schiller in his aesthetics, in which omission, of course, he is quite in keeping with most of Schiller's contemporaries.

In the case of originality we seem to find something of a contribution in Browning's aesthetics. His implications that the quality of originality lies in ever new discoveries and revelations of the oneness in essence of all things is less implied, at least, if not altogether absent from previous romantic aesthetics. To be sure, the earlier aestheticians had often pointed out the discovery and revelation of this oneness through art, but I do not remember that any of them characterized this sort of thing as originality on the part of the artist or his works.

But a clearer contribution still lies in the poet's definition and characterization of artistic creation. In his opinion artistic creation consists in reanimating, resuscitat-

ing, giving added and prolonged life to what is already dead or on the way to death in cast-off or outworn forms and shapes. Creation in his sense is the breathing of the artist's life into things, institutions, peoples, — past and present,—so as to bring alive and heighten the life that was or is in them, and thus to save them to the end that men may perceive and understand the oneness that everywhere and always pervades all things. This, so far as I am able to discover, is advance ground for its time on the matter of creativeness in art.

C. A Comparison of Theories Relative to the Work of Art.

In their notions respecting the autonomous, permanent, and transient phases of the art product, Browning and those who preceded him are almost if not quite at one. So, too, for the most part, in their views concerning the purposes of art. Our comparison at this point, therefore, concerns itself with the theories relative to the materials, methods, and classifications of art.

I have already noted that Browning has considerably more clarity and definiteness than the earlier romanticists in his implied identification of the personality mediated in art with the truths or ideas which make up art content. It is significant to observe here that to describe the materials of art Browning employs the term "truths" which was used by the rationalists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But by truths the poet means concepts enlarged and animated by sense, feeling, and imaginative elements into perceptual wholes such as correspond closely to what Plato and the romanticists agreed in calling Ideas, whereas the rationalists had in mind, for the most part, only the conceptual truths of science and philosophy. As opposed to the rationalists, then, and except for a greater inclusion of the personality elements, Brown-

ing is in practical agreement with his romantic predecessors concerning the general nature of the materials of art.

But as to subordinate characteristics of these materials there are significant differences of opinion. For one thing, Browning puts a somewhat greater stress than his predecessors upon the emotional and immediately intuitive elements of art content and he emphasizes more than they the relative nature of truths. Again, he lacks the clear and thorough-going differentiation between the sublime and the beautiful as distinct types of art content that is to be found in many of the aesthetic works of the romanticists. But in connection with art materials the most important difference, perhaps, is that pertaining to the nature and place of evil. Here Browning's treatment is quite unlike and, for all its fragmentariness, somewhat more extensive than that of most of the romanticists. His identification of the evil with the concealments and the limitations imposed upon art contents by their forms is not to be found in romantic aesthetics before his time and seems to connect the evil with the methods rather than with the materials of art. Yet his references to the evil as the negative and partial aspect of art truths due to their form limitations still justifies one in regarding the evil as a content element even in his aesthetics. It is here altogether conditioned, however, upon the formal elements and in this respect is given a unique treatment not elsewhere discoverable in any romantic aesthetics. Nowhere else, therefore, is the evil made so inescapably a necessary element of art.

I have already pointed out the differences of opinion concerning the separation and distinguishing marks of the stages or phases of the artistic process, and the differences relative to the identification of personality with art content. These differences, as previously noted, were rated as significant in themselves. It must now be observed

that they are even more significant for the consequent ramifications which Browning's variance concedes to his theorizing; for it is just because the poet finds the apprehending of art truths and the imaging of artistic conceptions separate and distinct from the execution of art products and dependent, as the latter process is not, upon the special gifts and faculties of artists, it is only because of this that he is able to explain art as a mediation and development of personality, to identify personality with the truth content of art, and to account for progress in and the classification of art as things dependent upon an increasing ascendancy of truth content over art mediums. Where the special gifts and faculties of artists are given a part also in the artificing of the art forms, as in done by the romanticists before Browning, such theories as those just set forth are quite untenable. Genius, personality, and such like things are expressible through form, but form itself cannot make them manifest,—that is, these things cannot be made a part of the form proper. There is room for objection to this, surely,—for thus far I have been Browning's advocate,—but there is ground for serious objection to the theory, too, from the standpoint that it allows to the special gifts of artists too little part in executing those many beautiful shapes, colors, lines, and all the varied excellencies of art forms, and so leaves the mediums of art in a far more sorry case than does the theory of the modern aestheticians generally.

But Browning's theory as to progress in art, which I have just characterized, among others, as an untenable one for the romanticists who preceded him, is at once the central and unifying theory for his whole aesthetics, and so requires some more detailed comparison with the central and unifying theory in the aesthetics of the poet's precursors. The fundamental premise of Browning's theory at

this point is to the effect that art works must manifest a constantly increasing ascendancy of contents over forms and that upon the degree to which they do so all the classifications, differentiations, and ratings of art epochs, kinds, and particular art products directly depend. The fundamental premise of the central theory of the romanticists, on the contrary, is to the effect that art works should manifest, as nearly as possible, a complete adequacy of forms and contents to one another, and that it is rather upon the degree of such adequacy attained that the classifications, differentiations, and ratings above specified directly depend. This is the fundamental difference,—a difference pertaining directly to art methods and classifications, for the most part,—between Browning's aesthetics and that of the great romantic aestheticians, for in this all the other differences are more or less involved.

The romanticists believe in the development of personality in artists and appreciators of art through their art activities and experiences, just as Browning does, but they do not identify the personality of artists with the truths embodied in art works as he does, consequently they find no corresponding growth between this personality and these truths such as is pointed out in his aesthetics. For them any manifestation of growth in art works is evidenced in both contents and forms and shows itself always by an increased adequacy between these two. They do not apply this to personality, but since they do not identify personality directly with content they are able to hold up a different standard for the latter and still have a consistent theory. But for Browning any growth, whether in personality or art contents, is necessarily evidenced by an increased ascendancy of contents over forms and so always shows itself in an increased revelation of the former and an increased transparency and immolation of the

latter. Accordingly the adequacy between content and form is the standard of excellence and progress and the basis for all art classifications in the modern aesthetics before Browning, whereas in his aesthetics this standard and this basis lie, on the contrary, in a growing inadequacy of form to content, or, as he prefers to have it, in a growing ascendancy of content over form. Thus in a mutual adequacy between form and content and in a progressive ascendancy of content over form we find the central principles of the two aesthetics.

It must be remembered, however, that Browning's central principle was nothing new, and that his only credit with reference to it lies in the fact that he for the first time raised it into a central and valid principle upon which to base the explanation of all art activities. The principle itself was to some extent a part of the aesthetics of the preceding romanticists, in spite of its incompatibility with most of their doctrines. Both Schelling and Hegel found such a principle operative in art activities, but in their opinions it was a principle which marks a decadent art. It is because he finds this principle, the ascendancy of content over form, operative in what he calls Romantic Art that Hegel believes this type of art marks the last stage in this field of man's activities. In his opinion the Ideas of the Romantic type of art indicate that Ideas are moving toward a state of development in which there will be no forms at all able to express them and so art will die out and be superseded by philosophy, for the expression of whose Ideas no external mediums, in the artistic sense, are needed. His original postulate in this connection was that art forms and contents undergo a mutual development, but when he came to explain Romantic art and to pronounce the death warrant upon all art to the exaltation of philosophy, because of the necessary ascendancy

of this art type in the modern world, then he seems to have found forms failing to keep pace with contents in development or else to have forgotten his original postulate altogether.

The point to be especially noted in all this is that the principle of ascendancy of content over form was not a new one when Browning took it up, but that with him for the first time it was made not only a legitimate but the basic principle upon which art activities were found to operate. Like Hegel, he believes in a mutual development in art forms and contents, but with the significant difference that, in his opinion, while the contents undergo constant increase and enlargement the forms must undergo development toward the vanishing point in transparency or self-immolation of some sort or other. But unlike Hegel, he sees no danger, no transcendence and end of art, in all this, for he believes that on earth no development of either contents or forms is possible such that the former are altogether inexpressible in art mediums or the latter altogether reach evanishment. His theory claims merely that there is constant development of the two in these contrary directions, that the higher the degree of this development the greater the progress of art, and that in consequence forms of increasing transparency and increasing significance in themselves, but still forms of some sort, will necessarily always be devised upon earth to give expression to the expanding and ever less form-encumbered truths of art, which, however, can still be expressed only through forms.

As is obvious and has already been pointed out, the differences here involved signify a difference in art's methods whereby its contents are put into mediums and a difference in the basis for the classifications and ratings of art products. As a consequence a considerable difference be-

tween Browning and his predecessors concerning the place of the several arts and of particular art works in classifications and evaluations might reasonably be expected. Such, however, is not in general the case. The only differences here of note are in the nature of drama and the exceptionally high rating assigned to music, and in the latter of these we have seen how even some of the romanticists concurred. Nor do I find that the significant difference in opinion concerning the nature of drama is altogether dependent upon the principle and theory of progress here set forth, but rather that it is to be explained partly, too, from the very nature of Browning's peculiar artistic gifts and from his general philosophy outside of aesthetics. For a more adequate substantiation of these matters and a review of the comparative positions of Browning and his predecessors respecting drama I must refer the reader back to Chapter V, Section 5C, of my study, where these matters are considered in some detail.

A more significant matter here claims our attention. Despite their wide difference in opinion concerning the proper relationship and adjustment between art forms and contents, both the romantic aesthetics and that of Browning still find in this relationship and adjustment the means art affords for healing the antitheses of life, but each after its own fashion. At this point the theory of his predecessors, at first sight, seems a more happy one than Browning's, for where form and content are adequate to one another, and content seems to rest satisfied in a freely chosen form, there all antitheses such as body versus soul, necessity versus freedom, and all the many others that have troubled man's life and thought, seem suddenly to have been resolved. Here even the infinite seems to be made at home in the finite. Here a harmony between spirit and matter or form is imaged which seems to satisfy

man that the troublous antagonists after all are reconcilable still on earth and so all is well. But on second sight one finds that Browning's theory may perhaps offer even a higher sort of reconciliation than this, for if art shows a constant ascendancy of content over forms and is an image of life just in proportion as it does so, then art at once reconciles all antitheses here too, though in a different manner than before; for here it images and promises at once, not the eternal reconciliation between the antagonists, but the gradual ascendancy and the eventual complete triumph of the higher spiritual member in all possible pairs of antitheses that have ever troubled mankind.

One may object, of course, that according to Browning's theory the complete reconciliations are always postponed to the after life, since the form and content antagonists can never be brought to adequacy in art, and the form antagonist can never be altogether escaped on earth. Yet this fails to take into account the central progress phase of the poet's theory. In the constant progress of spirit over matter and form such as is imaged in art, according to Browning's belief, there are constant partial reconciliations, all upon the sublime promise of such art that the spirit will eventually altogether triumph and that the antagonists of spirit are even now being gradually vanquished and on the way to an entire ultimate defeat and annihilation.

Whether from the practical or the ideal standpoint, then, one is forced to admit that as far as the reconciliations it offers are concerned the principle Browning would have centrally operative in art is just as rich and even more promising than the one the romanticists before him insisted upon. And if the very nature of art still forces one to agree with the romanticists to the extent that some degree of adequacy between form and content is forever

found an inescapable requirement of art, one still finds his admission does not at all conflict but is even strenuously insisted upon in Browning's theory, too, for the poet repeatedly declares that on earth there can be only partial reconciliations of the kind he would have art offer. In support of his side of the case one may safely say, in any event, that the partial harmonies of life with promises of ever fuller ones that constantly approach complete harmony by a full triumph of the spirit hereafter, these things seem now as always to constitute the highest sort of end and purpose that man has yet set himself to attain..

D. A Comparison of Theories Relative to the Appreciation and Effects of Art.

We have observed how Browning, in common with aestheticians generally, believes the appreciation of the beautiful to be universal, with variations only in degree, intensity, and prolongation. The divergence of Browning's opinion from the consensus comes in his belief that artists have the appreciative faculty or capacity in a higher degree than their fellows and that their productive impulses and powers are merely the result of this more intense and prolonged exercise of the appreciative experience. As a consequence the poet believed that the study of aesthetic appreciation does well to spend its efforts among the appreciations of artists, chiefly, whereas his predecessors preferred to consider art experiences among men generally of highest significance.

As to the nature of art experience, the faculties involved, and the reactions observable, there are practically no differences of opinion to report, since there is general unanimity to the effect that the whole man must be active and affected by art experience if a genuine aesthetic appreciation is to be had. There are those who think Browning gave vastly too large a place to the intuitive faculties, to

the emotions especially, in the appreciative process, but I doubt if anyone would claim that he outdoes the romantics as a group in this direction. Altogether there is close agreement on the nature of the process under discussion, then, and if Browning fails to use such terms as "objectification," "Einfühlung," and the like, to describe the several phases of the process, his description is still such as to have justified their use had he so desired.

Far more than his predecessors the poet is entirely out of sympathy with criticism, in the accepted sense of the term, and believes no criticism is required or advisable save that which each appreciation should carry within itself. He refuses to judgment as a separate and comparing process any role in appreciation, for he insists that to be valid art judgments must come as a matter of such experience or natural gift as to appear intuitively and spontaneously. In this he is quite at variance with Kant and some of the earlier modern aestheticians, but still closely at one with most of Kant's contemporaries and successors. His position relative to taste is practically the same as that concerning judgment and shows the same variance and convergence in comparison with the romantic group. For him, indeed, much more than for his earlier romantic fellowship, both judgment and taste are either the whole appreciative process and involve the whole man, or else they are only digressive fragments of experience and so to be avoided as subversive of the true ends of art appreciations.

On the effects of art, its pleasures, satisfactions, inspirations, reliefs, et cetera, I have said of Browning's views and of their likenesses and differences in comparison with previous romantic aesthetics all that needs to be said. I should like here to emphasize, however, what I have previously been at some pains to point out, that for our poet

art was seldom, as so often it was for the romanticists generally, a means of escape from life. For him it was rather necessarily a constant impulse and inspiration toward ever more intense and vigorous efforts in the ceaseless struggle and aspiration which constitutes the probational and progressive life process. And then, too, for him, more than for any of his predecessors save perhaps Herder and Schiller, the effects of art are always primarily for the individual and for society generally only through the individual. On this point I must here repeat yet again the significant fact that in his opinion the highest society and the society most worthy of attainment is just that social whole which is made up of the most highly individualized personalities, of the men best able to live and act without the common helps of their fellow-men; and he holds that only those art effects are legitimate which are conducive to the development of such a society through their creative influence in the building of self-dependent personalities.

Browning's views on the matter in hand are closely in accord with those of Schiller whose "Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man" is the best account yet written for an understanding of the many complications of the subject. If Browning has added aught here it is this, that artists themselves should forever first and most experience those effects of art that go to the upbuilding of a society composed of highly individualized personalities, for upon their constant outdistancing of mankind in general and their consequent leadership depends the continuity of the process, the prevention of standing places and stagnations. It was for lack of such a remedial agency that Schiller found himself obliged to appeal beyond the tribunal of history for evidence of the individualized society which he so invitingly characterized; for with such an

agency in view he might, like Browning, have found in himself and his fellow-artists the nucleus, at least, of just that social whole which he seems so beacon-like to have kept at the crest of all his goals.

3. A Criticism of Browning's Aesthetics.

A full and thorough-going criticism of the aesthetics we have had under investigation lies outside the expressed purpose of our study and would lead beyond its proper limits. Something less than this but still a sort of comprehensive criticism has already appeared, for in the presentation of any body of theory such as that with which we have had to do the very nature and viewpoint of the presentation itself inevitably carries a constant undertone of criticism. Beyond this all that seems required here, then, is some general estimate of Browning's contribution to aesthetics such as a brief criticism of his main theories and his aesthetics as a whole will afford.. To this end, therefore, we direct the closing section of our survey.

A. General Features.

With the fragmentariness and lack of system of the aesthetics under investigation we can obviously have no quarrel. Neither can we prefer charges against the poet because some of the phases of art are not at all or but very unsatisfactorily dealt with. As a poet and not a professed aesthetician we can hold him responsible only for what he gives. For this reason we are obliged even to forego the saying of much that might otherwise be said against his body of theory because of its insufficient attention to the appreciation and effects of art. Yet this neglect is largely due to an underestimate of this phase of art activities, rather than to the exercise of choice in the selection of

materials for his poetry, and so far as it is so we may justly declare that his aesthetics is deficient at this point..

B. Personality and Truths as Art Content.

The theory concerning the nature and place of personality in art seems a happy one in many respects, but it is extremely doubtful whether its close identification of personality with the truth content of art could be credibly substantiated. The poet would answer, of course, that this is a matter not open to proof, that it is an intuitive fact such as those not able to apprehend for themselves must take on trust from the Seers who are artists. Yet he himself assures us that sensations and empirical data must always be the starting point and a constituent element of art's perspective wholes. It is to be supposed, therefore, that if one finds this element lacking in the idea that personality and art truths are identical, then one may properly refuse to take on trust the intuitions which seem to confirm the identity. But outside of somewhat too close an identification of the two elements, the poet's theory as to the nature of art materials wherein personality and truths are rated and investigated is, in general, I believe, a quite acceptable one to the contemporary aestheticians.

C. The Emotional and Immediately Intuitive Elements in Art.

On certain particular features of the theory on art contents, however, there would still be wide disagreement. There has been frequent adverse criticism of the poet's own art on the ground that it gives too high a place to the emotional and immediately intuitive elements, and what is said here against his practice might, perhaps, be said with equal justice against his theory. Yet I am disposed to think that present-day aestheticians would quite generally

agree with the poet in giving to the feelings and the spontaneously apprehensible elements the first place among the components of art materials. It is quite equally certain. I am sure, that contemporary aestheticians would find such a belief not at all incompatible with giving sensations and images a much higher place among these components than is done in Browning's art theory or in his practice. The overestimate of art contents to the disadvantage of art forms in his aesthetics leads naturally to a neglect of sense and image elements. But an art practice based upon a theory which slights these two constituents must inevitably be somewhat too fragmentary and too evanescent, both in contents and effects, for it is by these elements chiefly that one finds in art something more or less rounded into a whole. Findings of this sort men have always found necessary for their aesthetic satisfactions and an art theory or an art practice which neglects the elements by which such findings are possible must be declared to that extent a faulty one.

D. The Evil in Art.

Then, too, there are many, I am sure, who would seriously object to Browning's account of the nature and place of evil in art. By identifying evil with the concealments and limitations imposed upon art contents by their forms he does seem to condition the evil too closely upon the formal element. Yet this is not the real difficulty, for the very fact that he lifts all the negative phases of the various arts into the moral category as evils is evidence that in art, at any rate, he regards them as phases or qualities of the spirit or truth contents and not as mere form qualities. However "null" and "naught" the evil may seem to him from the standpoint of metaphysics or eschatology, then,

he still finds it an original and inherent characteristic of the truths themselves in their earthly manifestations. For this reason, he would say, art must inevitably use the evil and can escape it only to the degree to which its forms can be immolated and its contents thereby appear free and transcendent. The paradox of this is solved when one sees that it puts the evil upon the contents but makes it due to the forms, hence removing the cause of the limitations gives opportunity for the desired freedom.

Against the identification of the evil with the concealments and limitations due to forms, then, it seems to me there can be no serious charges entertained. The real fault of the theory lies rather, here again, in an undervaluation of the form element and reaches here even to a degradation of art mediums, for art mediums are not altogether mere concealments and limitations upon contents, as Browning would have us believe, even though they always are this sort of thing to some extent. They are always somewhat in keeping with their contents and they are also the very means by which these contents become accessible to sense experience. There are positive and pleasure-giving qualities, truths of a sort even, in colors, lines, and shapes themselves. It is just Browning's failure to see fully or to give sufficient credit to these facts and his consequent belief that art mediums are only a concealment and limitation upon contents that constitutes the untenable part of his theory on the subject here under discussion. If he had granted art mediums their positive values as well as the negative ones which he too emphatically insists upon he might here have hit upon a distinct contribution to aesthetics, for even as it is the negative role his theory gives to these mediums affords a significant advance for the explanation of the nature and place of the evil in art.

E. Progress as an Aesthetic Principle.

In the final analysis, however, practically all of the deficiencies and weaknesses of Browning's aesthetics may be traced to the fundamental weakness of his central progress principle. The most objectionable feature of his whole art theory, it seems to me, lies in his attempt to apply the evolutionary doctrine in an impossible way and to the field of art where it is, to some extent at least, incompatible. But even granting the possibility of progress in art, the difficulty with all the attempted applications of the progress principle to the explanation of art is, as in Browning's case, that there has been no adequate connection found between the developments of art forms and those of art contents. Hegel, as we have seen, postulated a mutual development between the two but shortly afterward forgot or discarded his postulate. It is likely that he foresaw that it would not serve to explain the Romantic type of art wherein he noted a progressive ascendancy of content over form and so a movement toward the transcendence of art itself. Browning's principle of the progressive ascendancy of content over form, then, is Hegel's Romantic Art principle over again, except that Browning makes the principle central and basic in the explanation of art activities. And he is able to do this without thereby forecasting the end of art, as Hegel does, because he insists that the ascendancy of content movement is only a movement and can never reach completion, that forms can never be altogether dispensed with even though progress in art requires their progressive immolation toward the vanishing point. Obviously, however, all this is directly in the contrary direction from finding an adequate connection between the evolution of art contents and the development of art forms.

It would seem that if, in connection with his excellent

account of the development of the truths which constitute art contents, Browning had found and explained a corresponding upward development of art forms also, then this theory, here too, would have made a distinct contribution to aesthetics. For I fail to see why Hegel's discarded notion of a mutual development of Ideas and art mediums, if worked out and consistently applied, would not serve as a satisfactory theory by which to explain all art,—past, present, and future. By this principle of mutual development there is provision at once for the manifesting of all growths of truths, such as Browning requires in art, through the parallel and corresponding development of art forms. At the same time there is provision by this principle, also, for a constant adequacy between forms and contents such as the romanticists required, such as Browning also found necessary to some degree, and such as the very nature of art itself always demands.

And in spite of all the poet's insistence that life is a progress of the spirit within and toward a final transcendence over forms, that art must image life as just this sort of progress, and that in consequence art itself must always show a constant ascendancy of its contents over its forms, however convincing all this may be it will not altogether stand the tests for an aesthetic principle, for it is incompatible with the inherent nature of art. Browning himself admits this at times when he insists however inconsistently, upon art forms "answering to and indicative of the process of the informing spirit."¹ And if he had held to this idea and developed his theory in accordance with it he would have still been able to find art an imaging of life seen as an evolution of the spirit, for, as I have hitherto

1. Essay on Shelley, 1011.

indicated, by the development of art forms corresponding in all respects to the growths of the known truths of the world art will ever find itself capable, and in the most efficient way, of the manifestation of all the spiritual progress possible on earth.

This would necessitate, to be sure, the discarding of that part of Browning's theory which holds art responsible also for the imaging of the promise of spirit's final transcendence and escape from its embodiments, but the poet finds this transcendence and escape impossible on earth anyway, and his Cycle Theory expresses the possibility that the probation of spirit in forms may still continue in the after life, so I cannot see that there would be a great deal to sacrifice in letting go that part of his theory which is so beset with the "Grand Perhaps." And then, if the imaging of such a transcendence is still insisted upon, even so one can easily find the promise of a spiritual triumph, too, in an art whose forms are required to undergo constant development on earth in order to keep pace with the growths of the truths which it aims to make manifest; for the spiritual growths which make upon forms the demands here indicated are conceivably enjoying already, or at least moving toward, as rare a triumph as anyone could wish for them.

There is the further objection to the progress principle in art, as Browning's theory sets it forth, that it leaves art no goal on earth and permits it no stopping places in the products of which one may find standard works for the judging of what has gone before, what is now being done, and what is to come. It is a principle that would keep art forever developing and allow it no vantage points in which to stand, even for a moment, and be judged to see if its movement from the works that have gone before toward those that are to come really constitutes a progress or

merely a blind going. Without certain art works, or groups of works, singled out and set up as standards of excellence, to be excelled if possible, to be sure, but first of all to be equalled in their points of excellence, without this there is no criterion of progress at all. These seemingly necessary momentary goals and standard stages of its progress, if it has progress, Browning's theory seems to make quite impossible for art.

And then, finally, it is extremely doubtful after all whether progress is really compatible with art. There are changing fashions, changing forms, and changing contents, but in only a few fields can the art works of the present day be said to excel those of past epochs. Ancient Greek sculpture, Italian Renaissance painting, and Elizabethan drama have surely had no rivals in the times since. Nor can the present day art works be said to excel those of the heyday of Romanticism in their manifestation of the ascendancy of contents over forms. Historically at least, then, the sort of progress Browning's theory would require of art is not at all in evidence, and one suspects, therefore, as I have said, that evolution is perhaps altogether inapplicable to art and to its explanations.

And the progress theory is in most ways a rather unsatisfactory one anyway. In an age when the evolutionary doctrine is central and basic in all our thinking it may be necessary, perhaps, for the sake of current understanding, to drag in its principles even in the field of aesthetics where they are more or less incompatible, but I very much doubt that aesthetics or art has much to gain from such misapplications. If the application must be made, then there seems only one possible principle of any promise, the one heretofore laudibly explained as a principle wherein Browning's idea of the progressive ascendancy of art contents over their forms is combined with the romanti-

cists' idea of adequacy between contents and forms. By such a combination a principle of mutual form and content development is achieved such as would always and everywhere fit any and all evolutionary explanations of art. And happily, too, such a principle would still serve should it at any time be conceded that evolution is not operative in art, for the adequacy of contents and forms would still be a requirement even though the progress phase were dropped in favor of mere change. But if any of these things are true, or even if all of them are false, even then Browning's progress theory has contributed something worth while to aesthetics. This idea that art must always image life as a progressive development of spirit toward freedom within forms on earth and, consequently, as a movement of the spirit here and now toward either a transcendence of forms or else an existence in higher forms hereafter, this, at all events, is still and always will be a very worthy and fruitful ideal for art. In his explanation of the development of the materials of art and of the ideals of art relative thereto he is surely on firm ground and has made a notable addition in clarity, at least, if not in positive doctrine, to the body of aesthetic theory.

F. His Aesthetics as a Whole.

To pass final judgment upon Browning's aesthetics and do so with justice is a difficult task, for there is no other aesthetics quite like it in respect to its total inclusion within works no one of which is wholly or even primarily given to the setting forth of aesthetic theory. There are, then, no precedents to judge by. Even the great poet-philosophers among the founders of modern aesthetics some time or other and once at least in every case did a work altogether given to the expression of theories on art. The same is true of all the poet-philosophers, except Browning,

who have made worth while contributions to aesthetics. With these facts in mind one's final word on Browning's art theory as a whole is inevitably an expression of admiration and approval. Whatever its defects and weaknesses in parts it is still as a whole a notable achievement. It compares favorably with the aesthetic contributions of the poet-philosophers among his predecessors and is only less known than theirs, I must believe, just because of its inaccessibility in the scattered and artistic settings of its poetic allocations.

But even so, what about all these theories? I had promised no satisfaction to such inquiries, except to such readers as are able to find answers for themselves in the survey presented. It is a hope, to be sure, that such answers do lie in the study for those disposed to find and apply them for the ends of poetic appreciation. As an indication of what I here have in mind,—it has seemed to me such a study might help toward a more general knowledge of the fact that theories can be thrown back into the concrete; can be given again the conditions of their origin in sensations, feelings, and images; and can, therefore, be rescued from the isolated and scantily-visited realm of intellectual abstractions for the benefit of the many to whom intellectual quests and findings in themselves are largely inaccessible and so of little meaning or appeal. To find art theories given the wholeness of art activity and art experience itself through discovering them as a part of the very life of a Saul, an Abt Vogler, and fifty, yes an hundred, other men and women, this is indeed to find ourselves in the very current of humanity, sharing appreciations that we have been prone to think reserved only for the few.

If the theories herein presented have come anew to readers because they have been seen from the vantage point above indicated, then it would seem that for such

readers there is opened vast new ranges of appreciation in Browning's poetry, to say nothing of many another life work in art which first presents itself to appreciation from such a lookout.

And it must be obvious to even the cursory reader of Browning that it is to just such a vantage point and lookout that the poet constantly invites him. Art theory in company with art experience of any sort he invites men generally to share, and he assures them that it is accessible to all even as to his own "Men and Women"; and even though the degree may vary with individuals, he presses the fact that all other accomplishments and experiences have their similar variable universality. And all this the poet is at pains to repeat and rephrase time and again because of his eager conviction that art experience in all its phases is a part of life, a thing to be universally indulged to the end of fuller and richer existence. Thus I come full circle to whence I set out and seem, to some degree perhaps, to have justified the inclusion of Robert Browning among the few genuine artist-philosophers that the times and conditions of human life have thus far produced.

Yet though the poet deserves a place among the artist-philosophers of the world for his contribution in aesthetics, he will still necessarily always be judged chiefly on the basis of his poetic rather than his aesthetic contribution. The fact that his art theory practically all lies within his poetry makes this inevitable. And whatever findings for aesthetics have been pointed out from his works, these will necessarily remain of primary importance to students of Browning's poetry rather than to the historians of aesthetic doctrine. For such students, open-minded to the treasures from any and every field, there is to be found among the many things that lie in his poetry as additional to the artistry, an ever-present help to the appreciation and the understanding of art.

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